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Immortality and the future

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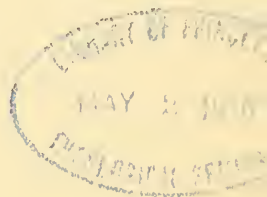
# IMMORTALITY AND THE FUTURE

*THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE  
OF ETERNAL LIFE*

BY

✓  
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TO  
MY WIFE



## PREFACE

THIS little book is meant as a first guide to those who are studying the problems of Eschatology, and who wish to do so in the light both of history and of faith. Accordingly, these two interests have been in view throughout. By saying so much, I hope that I sufficiently indicate what is and what is not to be looked for in the pages that follow. The book—much of which has appeared in the *Expositor*—was planned before war broke out; but the subject of which it treats, and especially the great themes of death, immortality, and the life everlasting have in the interval laid hold upon all hearts with new power.

For kind help in reading proofs I am again indebted to my friend and colleague, the Rev. Prof. H. A. A. Kennedy, D.D., whose suggestions have much improved the text.

Some of the best literature for those who wish to pursue the study of this field is mentioned in the footnotes, but no attempt has been made to form a select bibliography.

H. R. MACKINTOSH.

*New College, Edinburgh,  
October 1915.*

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# PART I

## THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

### CHAPTER I

#### ETHNIC IDEAS OF DEATH AND THE FUTURE

IN the vast field of religious history, so various in belief and custom, it is impossible to select more than a few characteristic types of ethnic "eschatology." These cast light on the Christian hope either by contrast or by their historical and preparatory influence.

#### (a) *Primitive Races*<sup>1</sup>

Among primitive or savage races it is held universally that something or other in man does survive death. Three groups of ideas prevail, often combined at random or used alternately. (1) The corpse is considered still to be in some sense alive. It is given a place at meals and provided with food and drink; or has its sinews cut, lest it should revisit its old haunts; or its grave is heaped with stones, to keep it down; in its neighbourhood, men speak low. (2) Mingling obscurely with this is a notion of that which persists separate from the body—the man himself, grown invisible. It is not incorporeal, therefore

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Steinmann, *Jenseitsvorstellungen der primitiven Völker*.

not mere soul, but rather the whole man, only unseen. In Melanesia, the dead king's shade is conducted to the shore and bidden step on board an invisible skiff, which bears him to a distant land. Elsewhere the distinction between (1) and (2) is less clearly marked. The ghosts or shadows of the dead may be seen at sunset or in moonlight; their whispers are heard; their footsteps, even, may be detected in ashes strewn on the path. On the journey to the place of the dead they are exposed to peril and adventure. Giants may devour them; rocks beside the narrow way crush them suddenly; bridges gape and let them drop in the abyss. They may even die and dissolve in nothingness—this last, as is sometimes believed, after a series of deaths. This ghost-idea may have arisen from contemplation of the corpse, as devoid now of what made the living self; also from noises heard in the hut or house of the departed and thought to be his step or voice or sigh—tokens, that is, of his unseen presence. Nor must the great influence of dreams be forgotten: for the dream-world is as real as the living, and in its visions the *Doppelgänger* of the dead returns to friend or foe. (3) Mixed up with these two is the conception of a life-soul or life-substance. This is the principle of nutrition and growth, dwelling in the body as a finely material entity and leaving it with the last breath. It is the cause of life. Over it we have no power; it may at any time desert the body and have to be coaxed back. After death it may inhabit a bush or stone, a bird or butterfly or snake.

A like variety marks the posthumous fortunes of men. The dead haunt familiar places, the old hut and village; or as ghosts, often unfriendly, they dwell in the jungle and the dark; as grasshoppers, they flit round their graves; they may even be reborn into earthly life. Possibly owing

to a desire to put them farther off, there arose the idea of a land or kingdom of the dead, to which they travel. It may be situated in a distant island or deep under the sea; it may lie on the mountain heights or in the stars; it may be subterranean. All these notions occur, sometimes in conjunction. The existence of the dead, while they remain near their old home, is one of misery, for they need food, drink and warmth as much as ever, and depend for them on the attentions of the living. To satisfy craving they may even have to steal. In the distant paradise, as with the Kamtschatkaks and Chippewayas, it is different, and many luxuries are promised. But in essentials the soul-land resembles this life; there is farming and fishing and hunting, sometimes of an easier and more productive kind than here. In war, there are no mortal wounds. When, however, the soul-land is pictured as in two divisions, a better and a worse, the dead are not assigned to these on any principle we should call moral. What decides is their possession of "mana" or supernatural force—their ability of mind or body, and the position gained thereby in life. The distinction is a social one, though it is true that men killed in war, or in the chase, can count on special favour. But the childless are without hope; among certain animistic tribes, lepers have no prospect but that of slavery. Much also depends on proper burial; the unburied wander to and fro in a state of dangerous discontent. Usually there is no thought of future retribution for wrongdoing.

In general, we are left with the impression of an empty and unattractive existence—shadowy and pithless, and all but totally destitute of moral quality. Note specially that these animistic beliefs have really nothing to do with religion. They represent, rather, a primitive idea of the soul

applied to the fact of death. Everything happens of itself, as by a physical nature-process; and the cult of departed souls is in no sense a religious act, implying a felt relationship to the divine, but an affair between men living and men dead. Fear and self-interest are the motives which prompt worship and observance. Only in this sense is daily life affected by it all. Still, as to the universal and unfaltering assurance that death is not the end, there can be no question. Its steadfastness is proved by the alacrity with which relatives or slaves submit to die at the graveside of the chief, in order to serve him in the soul-land.

(b) *The Religion of Greece*

The thought of death was hateful to the Greek mind, whose chosen field was this actual world of life, brightness, enjoyment. In educated circles two types of piety are distinguishable, both of historic importance: what may be called the Olympian type, based on the Homeric poems and represented at its noblest by Pindar, and the ecstatic, rooted in Orphism, embodied in the religion of Dionysus and the Mysteries, and conveyed to later times mainly through Plato and Neoplatonism.

In Homer, souls after death inhabit the shadow-land ruled by Hades and Persephone, the exit from which is guarded by the great dog Cerberus. This realm of shades, named Erebus, is variously placed in the depths of the earth and in the far west, its gateway where the sun goes down; although certain favourites of the gods, who do not die, dwell in a distant isle, in fields Elysian. Rivers encircle the place of gloom, and Charon is later pictured as ferrying souls across the Styx, an obol for payment being placed in the mouth of the corpse. The *eidola*, or phantoms of the dead,

are condemned to a thin, spectral, wretched existence, not worthy to be called *life*, which can be roused to a certain half-consciousness by a draught of blood. "The Homeric picture of the destiny awaiting men hereafter," says Adam, "is one of totally unrelieved gloom."<sup>1</sup> Retribution is scarcely alluded to. The gods can bestow real immortality, but the gift is not conferred on moral grounds. In Homer generally the dead are little regarded by the living. Much of all this is a survival from prehistoric animism, and the influence of Babylonia is also strong.

These vague epic conceptions of the future left a later age unsatisfied. In popular religion, that of peasant and shepherd, it was a first care to make the dead content, to better their condition so far as might be, and to keep the hostile at a distance. Subterranean or chthonian gods hold them in sway. Hecate is the dread guide of souls. "Mother Earth" brings men forth and takes them to herself again.

More positive ideas were generated by the influence of Orphism. Human character was now regarded as persisting beyond death, and prominence was given to the notion of the future recompense of both good and evil. This last idea had been prepared for by a reference in Homer to the Erinyes, who take vengeance on perjurers. In Orphic apocalypses much is said regarding the misery of the wicked, their punishments being designed to purify from the flesh and to prepare for ultimate reunion with the divine. Orphism, indeed, first based the hope of immortality on the conviction that the body is the spirit's dungeon, and attached to this a belief in many reincarnations. Escape from the wheel of birth and death is gained by repeated lustrations in this life or

<sup>1</sup> *Religious Teachers of Greece*, 60.

in the intermediate state, and by drinking of the right fountain in the next. At last the soul becomes a god instead of a mortal.

A passionate interest in the future life inspired the Mysteries, of which the most famous were celebrated at Eleusis. Here was represented the grief of Demeter seeking her lost child Kore, and finding her again—a dramatic representation found in old nature-myths, of annual changes in vegetation. But the earlier nature-cult had been transmuted into ardent religious feeling, which was fed and quickened at Eleusis by fasting, scenery and ritual. The experience of the initiated reached its climax in the vision of the sacred scenes known as ἐποπτεία. What was then told the adepts is unknown, but at least they went away consoled respecting their destiny in the future world: as the child of the goddess was found again, so they would be saved from the gloom of Hades. Thus in the “Homeric” hymn we read: “Happy is he among deathly men who hath beheld these things. And he that is uninitiate, and hath no lot in them, hath never equal lot in death beneath the murky gloom”; and in a well-known fragment Sophocles strikes the same note. What was held forth was apparently not the prospect of resurrection, but a blissful existence in the realm of Hades. The Cynic philosopher Diogenes grows angry at the thought that an initiate thief would fare better in the future than so good a man as Epaminondas.

There is a remarkable passage in Sophocles where Antigone expresses the hope that kind hands will receive her in the other world. “I cherish good hope that my coming will be welcome to my father, and pleasant to thee, my mother, and welcome, brother, to thee.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Antig.*, 987 ff.

Many elements of Orphic and Dionysian religion appear in Plato, in nobler form. The soul, for Plato, is the principle of life and motion, in itself part of the lower world of "becoming," yet capable of being raised to the level of true being if purged by truth and wisdom. These ideas are often expressed freely in the language of the Mysteries. Especially the *Phædo* gives sublime expression to the view that after death the soul, exiled here, will revert to its proper home, freed from the load of sensuous desire, and equal to the perfect knowledge of Ideas. In the opinion of good judges, Plato is not here pointing to an impersonal absorption of the individual self. Rather, as Adam puts it, "it is noticeable that the conclusion which he draws from nearly all his attempted proofs of immortality in the *Phædo* and elsewhere, has reference to the individual human soul, your soul and my soul."<sup>1</sup> For the religious thought and feeling of later times, Plato's doctrine of the imprisonment and liberation of the soul was of incalculable moment. Yet it is, after all, a conclusion more philosophic and intellectual than religious, derived rather from reflection on the nature of the mind than from faith in the divine character.

### (c) *The Religion of Egypt*

No ancient people so cared for the state of the dead as the Egyptians. The pyramids are royal tombs, and much the larger and more important part of the surviving literature is occupied with the lot of the departed. We have no space here to distinguish the religion of the Old Kingdom from that of the Middle Kingdom and the Empire.

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, 460. See also the introduction to the dialogue in Jowett's translation.



Elaborate efforts were made, in the treatment of the dead, to secure for them life, well-being and health—the Egyptian ideal of human welfare, projected into the future world. By the Memphitic period, mummification had become a high art. The body was opened, and, when the brain and intestines had been removed and placed in jars, was treated with bituminous substances and swathed in linen. Rich or eminent persons had food and drink and furniture placed in their graves (often in effigy), and endowed sacrifices were made on their behalf to Osiris or Anubis. Hope for another life thus clung to the human remains. What in man survived death was called *ka*—that is to say, his genius or ideal self, later thought of as abiding in the grave; in a more spiritual reference the soul is named *ba*, and conceived in the form of a bird, travelling to the other world amid shifting fortunes.

In the confused mass of ideas, originating in different ages, three lines of thought and rite have been distinguished.<sup>1</sup> But they cross and re-cross: the same soul, in whole or part, may be imaged as participating in all three.

(a) The grave-life. As in primitive religions, existence in the tomb ("the house of *ka*") is dark and dreary. The *ka* depends for its sustenance on the gifts of children or posterity. The advantages of wealth persist after death, but stereotyped magic formulas are effective at every turn to avert danger or supply viands.

(b) The paradise of Osiris. This is located in the fields of Aalu, or the land of Hotep, formerly conceived of as situated in the fruitful north-east delta of the Nile, but later removed to the firmament and set within the Milky Way. It is a paradise of farmers—the fields fabulously rich,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Tiele's *Kompendium der Religionsgeschichte*<sup>4</sup>, 112 ff.



the corn seven ells high, with shady foliage and cool streams. The just soul—or *ba*—lives here in the clear light of the sun-god Ra. It is assisted by underlings—represented by small figures of earthenware placed in the grave; these being designated “the answerers,” because when their lord is challenged they answer for him.

(c) The voyage with the sun-god to the underworld. A very old doctrine in Egypt is that of the mystic identification of the dead with the god of the world below, Osiris or Ra. To begin with, this privilege was reserved for the Pharaohs. The dead king is himself an Osiris, shares his fortunes, and, like him, is eternally renewed. But later the ineffable union was accorded to all the dead, and the individual is named in inscriptions “Osiris N.N.” Conjoined with this is the belief that the departed accompanies the solar deity and his divine escort in the sun’s daily round, completing the same victorious march, radiating the same power and receiving a like honour. The soul, embarked in the boat of Ra, sails with him through the twelve stations of the nightly sky or world of darkness (*Duaut*), which is pictured as a narrow vale with a river flowing in the midst. This dark region is inhabited by many spirits or gods, whom the sun-god visits as Pharaoh might do the towns upon the Nile. The soul fears the east, where the executioners dwell who do judgment upon the adversaries of the god of light. All depends on the power of the soul to pronounce at each point the proper spells and charms.

The *Book of the Dead* proves that the Egyptians had a more or less distinct belief in the moral conditions of future blessedness. This book, as has been said, “is the soul’s *vade-mecum* for the underworld, and contains the forms the soul must have at command in order to ward off

all the dangers of that region, and to secure an easy and happy passage through it.”<sup>1</sup> The idea of moral retribution after death is prominent. The famous 125th chapter offers a graphic and solemn picture of the judgment. In the Hall of the Two-fold Righteousness Osiris presides, a crown upon his head, in his hands a staff and scourge. The water of life surrounds his throne, and above sit forty-two spirits of judgment. The dead is brought in by Maat, goddess of truth, and his soul weighed by the jackal-headed Anubis and the bird-headed Horus. The extracted heart is laid on one scale; on the other rests an ostrich-feather, the symbol of truth and right; and the ibis-headed Thoth keeps the record. The dead protests on oath his innocence of the forty-two deadly sins, as thus: “I have not done evil in the place of truth; I did not report evil of a servant to his master; I allowed no one to hunger; I caused no one to weep; I did not diminish the offerings of food in the temple; I did not take milk from the mouth of the child; I am pure, I am pure, I am pure.” In the implied ethical code there is much that is elevated, although its application is loose and mechanical. A scarab placed on the breast of the dead, over the heart, bears the inscription: “O heart, do not appear against me as a witness, do not oppose me before the judges.” One passage states that a sixth part of the dead are condemned, the others justified. When the heart has been weighed and not found wanting, the dead is rejuvenated in every limb, and the water of life poured over him. But many encounters with crocodiles and vipers still await him, against which he must be fortified by amulets and spells, before he reaches paradise at last or is accounted worthy to journey with Ra upon

<sup>1</sup> Menzies, *History of Religions*, 151.

his course. If the weighed heart is too light, the soul must turn back, a prey to indescribable horrors.

Inscriptions show that uncertainty about the next life was often felt. Herodotus declares that at the banquets of rich Egyptians the wooden image of a dead man used to be carried round and shown to each guest with the admonition: "Look upon this; then drink and be merry, for after death thou shalt be as he."

#### (d) *The Religion of India*

Here it is essential to differentiate three or four great types of thought regarding death and the sequel.

(a) The Vedic religion. The higher form of Vedism, priestly and orthodox and represented by the hymns of the Rigveda, must be distinguished from the more superstitious popular religion, a peculiarly unstable form of polytheism. In this naïve early time, ideas about life after death have little prominence, though the cult of ancestors is practised sedulously. Beliefs are formless and obscure, often hardly differing from those prevalent amongst all primitive tribes.

(b) Brahmanism. For this later age our knowledge is due mainly to the Upanishads, the oldest of all speculative writings, which were added to the earlier Brahmanas or ritual treatises. In the Upanishads is given an elevated metaphysic and doctrine of salvation, with Brahma as the central notion. At first, Brahma stood for the unseen secret power (now usually designated by the Melanesian word *mana*) which primitive man sees operating in every phenomenon he cannot understand. Later, this became the world-principle—the Absolute, in short; incomprehensible, indefinable, the soul or substance both of man

and of being everywhere. Three ideas or doctrines gradually entered, and fixed the direction of Indian thought. (1) *Transmigration*. After each death in an unending series the soul is born into a new bodily life, as plant or animal or man or spirit or god. But, further, each life is bound to its predecessor by the iron chain of (2) *Karma*, a word signifying "action together with its consequences." Combined with transmigration, this yields the doctrine that according to his acts and disposition in one life a man may rise to a higher existence or sink to a lower in the next re-birth. Action produces a fine material in the body, which remains after death and takes a new body to itself. The moral significance of this is clear—as also the despair it must engender. Now release from the wheel of lives, so passionately sought, seemed possible only through knowledge. Hence the newer philosophers taught that to be delivered from Karma once for all we must grasp or realise the thought of (3) *Atman-Brahma*. Atman means breath (Deussen translates it, however, as "this Ego"), and hence one method of attaining the condition of blessedness is the regulation of breathing. Atman is the permanent thing in man; it is indeed the spiritual substance not in man merely but in everything, "the unity behind the semblance of the manifold and dual."<sup>1</sup> And the great secret of escape both from illusion and from suffering, is to see Atman as one with Brahma, the All. *Tat tvam asi*—"thou art that": he who perceives this identity of the infinitely petty individual self with the great Whole has passed beyond the reach of evil; he has entered into Brahma through the preparatory stages of asceticism and meditation, has attained to a condition best compared to dreamless sleep, and

<sup>1</sup> Tiele, *op. cit.*, 262.

is now indifferent to pain or pleasure—one for whom there no longer exists father or mother, gods or Vedas, life or death. Whatever we may think of this as a doctrine of life and its issues, at least the great philosophers who impressed it so deeply on the Indian mind helped to lift the religious spirit to a level far above the smoke of sacrifice or the muttered spells of black magic.

About 500 B.C. Buddhism appeared as a branch on the great tree of Indian religious speculation. It teaches a view of salvation in utter contrast to much popular belief. Thus it rejects the idea of the Atman, in which soul or self becomes an absolute world-principle; it may, indeed, be described as the theory of no-soul, a sheerly phenomenalistic doctrine both of spirit and things. According to the Buddha, the one great problem is that of release from the wheel of life. Life is pain. All existence is impermanent seeming, and the so-called self resembles nothing so much as flowing water. Suicide as a way of escape from painful being is self-defeating, for all are in the power of the law of transmigration; and the Buddha's constant theme is "the misery of this awful succession of births to renewal of suffering." How can the cycle be ended? We must realise that all pain springs from desire; to eradicate desire will exterminate pain and so bring life itself to an absolute close. There is no immortal "soul" in man, but only an insatiable longing or impulse bearing us on into each new existence, and rewarding or avenging in each the moral quality of the last. To kill the thirst for life we must enter upon the holy eightfold path, indicated by rigorously ascetic and monastic maxims. Not only must a man thus obtain control over bodily propensity; he must practise meditation, *i. e.* entranced and intense musing, according to carefully prescribed methods. In this way all conscious

thought is gradually withdrawn, and the illusion of being is dispelled.

The state of the man who has thus escaped from pain, finite illusion and transmigration, is called Nirvana. It is not necessarily delayed till death, although at death it comes to complete outward manifestation. The word Nirvana means extinction. But two opposed views have always been held as to its precise implications.<sup>1</sup> On the one hand, it is regarded as signifying the sheer cessation of all existence, and the general philosophy of Buddhism, with its soul which is but a name and devoid of all reality, is appealed to in confirmation. On the other hand, in many passages Nirvana is set forth as a quite positive blessedness; it is also argued that no religion could possibly place its goal in pure nihilism. The oldest sources seem to represent the Buddha as evading the dilemma, and putting it aside as equally irrelevant to salvation with the question whether space is infinite or finite. Later, popular ideas of heaven and hell supplanted the idea of Nirvana. It is clear that the value of that idea depends on a prior consideration of the fundamental principle of Buddhism, that life and pain are one thing. If this principle is true, then it may well be that eternal extinction of consciousness and of all significant being is the consummation most devoutly to be wished. But no one who has apprehended the great values present in Jesus Christ could make eternal death an object of desire. Against the wearied despair or disgust at life characteristic of Buddhism, and its passive longing for annihilation, must be set the Christian's strong and joyous hope in Him who brought life and immortality to light.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Orelli, *Allgemeine Religionsgeschichte*, I. 77 f.



(e) *The Religion of Persia*

In the Persian religion, it is difficult to mark off the teaching of the Gathas, which has a fairly direct connexion with the great prophet Zarathushtra, from the later portions of the Avesta. But it is at least clear that Zarathushtra rose to the doctrine of immortality and a better world through a pure and fervid belief in the divine justice.<sup>1</sup> For him all life is moral conflict. There is a great cosmic struggle being waged between Ahura Mazda, the good supreme deity, and the Dævas or evil spirits, with the Demon of the Lie at their head, who have broken into creation leading in their train unbelief, sickness, and death. At each point, man takes and must take sides with Ahura or the adversary. His destiny, accordingly, lies in his own hands. Zarathushtra distinctly foretells a retributive judgment after death, and the Gathas apparently contain the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. Doubtless many inconsistencies of detail occur, as in all systems of the kind. But attention is fixed throughout on the coming of the Kingdom. The prophet may have used ancient symbolisms freely, importing at will a new meaning.

The merits of the righteous are being laid up on record. As it has been put, "The victory of the world of Ahura over that of the Dævas is secured by the preponderance of good works over evil at the last account: the promised reward is secured for the individual by the preponderance of good in his own personal reckoning. Zarathushtra as 'Overlord' (*ahū*) takes care that none of the faithful man's good works shall be lost, but entered

<sup>1</sup> Mazdeism is the first religious system in which the idea of future retribution appears as a main constitutive logma.

in the account to his credit, and treasured up in Ahura's 'House.' As 'Judge' (*ratu*) he accomplishes the final enfeebling of the world of the Druj, and the final dominion of Ahura Mazdah."<sup>1</sup> After death, the souls both of good and evil appear on the Kinvat-bridge—broad, said an old myth, for the righteous, "but for the godless man as narrow as a razor's edge, so that he falls into hell." Zarathushtra gives moral significance to this by laying stress on the preceding judgment, in which conscience awakes and a man knows his own true state. The idea of weighing merits is basal in Persian thought. Men whose good deeds weigh lighter than their sins are doomed to dwell with the Lying Spirit for ever. There is a separate place for such as are equally good and bad, and it stretches from earth to the stars. But this is not comparable to purgatory. The good soul, on the other hand, enters on the bliss of Paradise, variously known as "the House of Good Thought," "the Kingdom of Blessings," "the Best," etc.; and quite possibly these phrases need imply no sort of spatial conception. Here in immortality the soul is clothed with an ever-young and heavenly body. Hell is designated "the House of the Lie," "the Worst Existence," and so forth. It is the abode of stench, foul food, and darkness. Later Parsism taught the annihilation of Ahriman and his followers, but according to Zarathushtra hell will be their eternal lot; "To all time will they be guests for the House of the Lie." It is obvious that with all its higher elements this scheme of salvation and perdition is, in large measure, legal and even commercial in character. For Zarathushtra there is no such thing as forgiveness of sins. The righteous have a claim on divine rewards, and in the great assize they press it.

<sup>1</sup> Bartholomæ, quoted by Moulton, *Early Zoroastrianism*, 160.



When we turn from the future of the individual to the destiny of the world, our material must be drawn almost entirely from the later developments of Parsism. According to the Mazdean faith, time lasts for 12,000 years, divided into four equal periods. In the first period, Ahura brought the spiritual creation into being, to the disgust of Ahriman, who needed 3000 years to recover from his consternation. In the second period, the material creation arose, Ahriman countering this by the production of demons and evil spirits. Six thousand years after the beginning of things Ahriman invaded the world. At the outset of the fourth and last period Zarathushtra came forward with the religion which had been revealed to him, and thenceforward the forces of light and progress are in the ascendant. Each successive thousand years is under the guidance of a new prophet of the seed of Zarathushtra. The great prophet himself had looked for the new Kingdom immediately, but later church speculation put it far off in the future. Each of the world-saviours (*Saosyant*) granted as the millenniums pass will be born in supernatural wise; the last of them, under the name of Astvatereta, will effect the perfect healing of the world and the resurrection of the dead. All creatures will be made immortal by his very glance. The Spirit of the Lie will be swept away, and Ahriman made impotent for ever. Last of all comes the purifying judgment. For three days the wicked are purged in flaming metal. A meteor having melted the contents of the hills, the red-hot stream will flow over the earth, soft as warm milk to the righteous, but to the evil torment unspeakable. Thus all are purified. Only those whose gross sins have turned them into Dævas shall have no part in the coming bliss, and are appointed to utter destruction or annihilation. Then all men gather

round the *Saosyant*, or Redeemer, to receive from him and his subordinates the draught of immortality, made of "white Haoma." They live eternally on earth, as they do now, only there is no begetting of children. The Satan is consumed in fiery metal, and Ahura turns even the land of Hell into an abode of human felicity.

## CHAPTER II

### ESCHATOLOGY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT AND JUDAISM

ESCHATOLOGY, or the doctrine of the Last Things, is the ordered statement of what God will accomplish for His people at the End; and in the Old Testament this is set forth from two distinguishable but not separate points of view. First, as touching the community; next, and this only more or less indirectly, as touching the individual. On the one hand are the Hebrew prophets, looking for the establishment of God's actual reign on earth; on the other, chiefly later in the post-exilic period, the apocalyptic<sup>1</sup> writers who felt that this communal expectation must be supplemented by faith regarding the destiny of individuals after death. After the Exile, these two movements of thought affected each other vitally. It will be convenient to study them independently at first. But the field is vast, differences of opinion innumerable, and the

<sup>1</sup> The difference between Prophecy and Apocalyptic is really one of degree, not type. We may say, correctly enough, that Prophecy sees the consummation as coming to birth out of present conditions, through the moral government of Jahweh, while Apocalyptic looks rather for a new order, arriving by cataclysm, its interest thus entering wholly in the future, the New Age or æon. But the difference is not radical. Apocalyptic, like Prophecy, was inspired by motives of a fundamentally ethical character, and both as forms of expectation were grounded in the inviolable righteousness of God. The point of distinction that apocalyptic writings were mostly pseudonymous is after all external.

dates of many documents uncertain; and here, largely owing to the exigencies of space, nothing more can be attempted than a broad survey.

Behind the monotheistic teaching of the great eighth-century prophets, we catch glimpses of a popular belief in the coming Kingdom—a period of material and uninterrupted felicity, ushered in by the Day of Jahweh. Hence, when Amos asks: “Woe unto you that desire the Day of Jahweh! wherefore would ye have the Day of Jahweh? it is darkness, and not light” (v. 18), he is fulminating against the popular eschatology, but also he is employing traditional conceptions which it was to be the gradual work of the prophets to transfigure. Recent inquiry has shown analogies to Israelitish ideas within this field already existing in the literature of the ancient East, especially that of Babylonia and Egypt. These sources, going back far beyond 1000 B.C., foretell a future epoch of blessing and of curse, with famine, war, pestilence and darkening of the sun; perhaps also the appearance of a Deliverer King, who shall save the poor and banish falsehood.

In Israel, the assurance prevailed that Jahweh and His people were so inseparably joined that under no circumstances would He cast them off. His “day” must bring their triumph. Amos strikes a new note. The people, he declares (vi. 3 ff.; viii. 2 ff.), are incurably evil, and for them the Day means judgment, a judgment now close at hand and fatal to the national existence. The Assyrians are drawn near to execute the divine sentence. Words of compassion close the book (ix. 8 ff.), but these many scholars reject as a later interpolation. We are not to suppose that Amos had ceased to believe in Jahweh’s gracious plan, but its further course he could not see.

Hosea brings a message of deeper consolation. Taught by the tragedy of his own life, he clings

amid the darkness to the unwearied love of God. Israel will not be cast off for ever. True, the impending catastrophe will fall; but beyond that rises the vision of a people led back to the wilderness to renew their first love (ii. 14 ff.). With the same note of grace the book concludes.

Amos and Hosca addressed the northern kingdom of Israel, but Isaiah speaks to Judah also. Some have read his prophecies as presaging unmitigated doom, and undeniably the chapter (vi.) relating his call to prophetic work does contemplate a dark future. At a later date, too, even after the withdrawal from Jerusalem of Sennacherib's army, he will not join in the people's exultation. None the less, the strain of hope never dies out. Jahweh has a plan, which His absolute and universal sovereignty will bring to being. The prophet's son bears the name Shear-jashub, "A remnant shall return." Judah's enemies are but instruments in the hand of God. There are wonderful promises yet to be fulfilled: Zion shall be established in the top of the mountains, and the nations shall resort thither for light and guidance (ii. 2-4); an era of peace will bring back the golden age (xi. 6 f.), diffuse righteousness, and witness an outpouring of the Spirit from above (xxxii. 15), especially on the future Davidic king. Isaiah's central thought is the transcendent majesty of Jahweh, a presupposition that forms the basis of all later supernatural eschatology.

Micah, a younger contemporary of Isaiah, lays emphasis solely on the darker aspect of the future; painting the onset of wrath, as other prophets do, with hues derived from very ancient nature-myths. But in Zephaniah, who sees the menace of the Day embodied in the approaching Scythians, we find his new feature, that judgment is to be world-wide, not limited to Judah.

Now, as these frightful predictions of ruin began

to be realised, the necessity for a more adequate doctrine of ultimate redemption unavoidably forced itself on the prophetic mind. A change begins with Jeremiah. He repeats the forecast of judgment, and declares to an impenitent people that nothing further now remains but the destruction of nation and Temple. But to this he adds promise (*e.g.* the beautiful words of xxix. 11). Salvation is of the Lord, and after an interval of seventy years He will visit them again and restore them to their own land (xxv. 12; xxxii. 15). A righteous Branch shall be raised up of David's house, to reign in justice over a free strong people and confer on them the blessings of the Messianic kingdom (xxiii. 5). Inestimable value belongs at this point to Jeremiah's new sense of the worth of the individual and of his personal fellowship with God under the New Covenant (xxxii.), which, by the new basis it supplied for future hope, greatly aided the disentanglement of eschatology from a too earthly realism. Henceforward not the nation but the individual constitutes the religious unit.

In Deutero-Isaiah the people are called upon, by a voice of glorious faith and poetry, to adore the sublime purpose of Jahweh, who, by the instrumentality of His suffering Servant, the righteous Israel, is accomplishing a world-embracing plan of redemption. The Servant will experience a wondrous resuscitation after death, and carry forward a new ministry on earth (lii. 13–liii.). Cyrus, the Anointed of the Lord, will overthrow the Chaldean power, thus opening to the Jews a happy return from exile. Zion will again be filled with glory: Palestine will be changed into a very garden. "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord." Idolatry shall disappear from the surrounding nations, and a new song of praise to Jahweh shall rise from one end of the earth to the other (xlii. 10 ff.).

After the Return, it is true, Judah's state long remained in pathetic contrast to the glowing forecast of prophecy. But the nobler minds "bated no jot of heart or hope." Haggai and Zechariah announced that when the temple was built again, David's kingdom would be re-established. Malachi introduced later the idea of a sifting judgment within the Jewish people, and, as his book now stands, this is preceded by the advent of "Elijah" (iii.). Joel, whose book has been described as "a compendium of eschatological dogmatic," foretells that the great Day of Jahweh will be marked by a notable outpouring of the Spirit. From now onwards a tendency arose to piece together pictures of the coming Age out of earlier prophetic indications, as well as to insert eschatological passages in current writings. It has been said with truth of relevant portions of the Psalter that they show how the post-exilic community "viewed the load of suffering under which they were bowed as but a preparation for glory. They look for deliverance to a sudden reversal of history, which is to arrive with the judgment of God. And they feel that the catastrophe may happen at any moment, that the wrath of God may cease and their right be vindicated." In Daniel much stress is laid on the eternity of the Messianic kingdom (ii. 44; vii. 27). Long before, about the middle of the fifth century, Dr. Charles holds, a new view of the Kingdom had appeared on the horizon, in Isaiah lxxv.-lxxvi. "Not the earth in its present condition, this later prophet declares, but a transformed heaven and earth were to be the scene of the kingdom." Even this was only preliminary to the final form of the eschatological hope. "This final form arose about the close of the second century B.C., when in the growing dualism of the times it was borne in alike on saint and sage that this present could never be the scene of the eternal



Messianic kingdom, and that such a kingdom demanded not merely a new heaven and a new earth akin in character to the old, but a new and spiritual heaven and earth, into which flesh and blood could not find an entrance. The eternal Messianic kingdom *can attain its consummation only in the world to come*, into which the righteous should enter through the gate of resurrection.”<sup>1</sup>

Scholars have all but proved that the conception of a personal Messiah—*i. e.* a royal Deliverer promised for the future—was in circulation amongst Oriental peoples at a date prior to the earliest documents of the Old Testament; which means that Messianic passages need not be late.<sup>2</sup> The prophets, however, found no difficulty in picturing the future Kingdom without a Messiah. Amos, Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Joel, and Daniel omit all mention of the personal King: the fundamental thought, after all, was the presence and action of God Himself. On the other hand, glowing representations of the Messiah occur frequently, perhaps in Gen. xlix. 10, certainly in Isa. ix. 6 f., where his titles are enumerated as “Wonderful, Counsellor, hero God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (cf. Zech. ix. 9, 10). The features are usually those of an ideal King, who will judge in righteousness and slay the wicked. This general conception takes on various shapes in the imaginative faith of different prophets,<sup>3</sup> and in certain passages what appears to be anticipated is not so much an individual Ruler as the founder of a dynasty, who shall bring in everlasting peace. It does not seem that the Jewish mind ever identified this royal Figure

<sup>1</sup> *Between the Old and New Testaments*, 70–71.

<sup>2</sup> Especially Sellin has argued this question: see his *Der alttest. Prophetismus*, 102–193.

<sup>3</sup> *E. g.* Isa. vii. 14, xi. 1–9; Mic. v. 2 ff.; Jer. xxiii. 5 ff.



with the suffering Servant of Jahweh, the ideal Prophet. The thought of a crucified Messiah was first made current coin by Jesus.

If we survey Messianic eschatology as a whole, from about 200 B.C. to the fall of the Jewish state,<sup>1</sup> a twofold tendency is perceptible. Most writers confine the Messiah within the bounds of humanity, while a much smaller number lift Him quite beyond the limits of the temporal and earthly into the region of transcendent pre-existence. His titles now are Son of Man (Enoch xxxvii.-lxxi.) and Son of God (4 Esdras v. 6). He comes from heaven, forgives sin, executes judgment and conquers death.

No uniformity of belief prevailed on the great questions of the resurrection, the Kingdom of God, the Messiah, the duration of His reign, or the fate of the heathen; yet the eschatology of Judaism is of crucial significance for New Testament interpretation. Note well that the course of the world is divided into two parts: the present age of imperfection, sin and death; and the future age of bliss and perfection. "The Most High hath not made one world, but two" is the keynote. Between the two periods is placed judgment upon all mankind, usually also the resurrection of the dead and the renewal of heaven and earth. The consummation, or its preparatory stage, is brought to pass by the appearance of the Messiah. God has foreordained the time of His advent, but the day and hour remain a divine secret. His approach will be heralded by portentous signs, which older prophets have described: they are the birth-pangs of the Messianic age. Among them are plagues, war, famine, accompanied by widespread moral corruption and unbelief. The first

<sup>1</sup> This was a period of national depression, and eschatology invariably flourished under the weight of trial. The worse things were, the nearer seemed the End.

stage in the establishment of the Kingdom is the political rehabilitation of the Jews by their deliverance from an alien yoke, Greek or Roman. The scattered members of the people shall be re-assembled, with Jerusalem as capital of the nations. God will be reconciled to His chosen race; they will be sanctified in His fellowship; the conversion of the Gentiles will ensue. According to certain writers of apocalypse, the Messianic Kingdom lasts for ever, but others consider it as only the concluding stage of earthly history, enduring for many years, but not eternal. The first group predict the resurrection of all faithful Israelites to partake of its joys, while the second treat this as merely the first resurrection, to be followed by a final conflict in which Satanic hosts attack the restored Israel but are overcome by the Messiah or by God Himself. Thereafter Satan is cast into Gehenna. The general resurrection, leading up to judgment, follows. The wicked are consigned to eternal fires by the irrevocable doom of the Most High. The New Age now begins, within a new heaven and a new earth, the scene of the Kingdom usually being heaven, where the blessed are clad in bodies of light.

The Sadducees, who formed the party of orthodox conservatism, rejected the idea of resurrection and a blessed future life. They clung to earlier modes of faith, unfamiliar with or hostile to these great gains of personal religious experience. To the Pharisees, who had moved forward less reluctantly, it was open either to find the long-expected Messiah in Jesus of Nazareth, or to relegate to an indefinitely remote future the fulfilment of their hopes. Thus, as it has been put, "Apocalyptic Pharisaism became, speaking historically, the parent of Christianity."

Let us now turn to the second great problem,

that of the individual life after death. In the concluding paragraph of the first section we have found the two eschatological questions merging gradually in one.

Hebrew thought, as revealed in the Old Testament, exhibits the vestigial survival of many ethnic beliefs regarding the condition of the dead, such as can be paralleled from most primitive religions. The older writing, as in a palimpsest, shines through the later script that has been superinduced upon it. The soul, released from body at death, is but "breath" or "wind"; cf. Isaiah xiv. 10, where the shades in the pit address the newcomer with the words: "Art thou also become weak as we?" It was sometimes held that death deprives the shade of knowledge, feeling and desire, but, as may be gathered from a very instructive instance—the raising of Samuel at Saul's request (1 Sam. xxviii.)—the dead might be recalled to the upper air by persons skilled in necromantic arts, and at least some of them were credited with a higher knowledge of the future. Even after the exile Isa. lxv. 4 denounces those who "sit among the graves and lodge in the vaults," evidently with a view to interrogate departed spirits. How profound an abhorrence these oracles of the dead evoked in later prophetic minds may be gathered from Isa. viii. 19: "On behalf of the living should they seek unto the dead? To the law and to the testimony!"

Like all primitive peoples, the Hebrews feared to remain unburied, and the menace of such a fate was felt as terrifying (Jer. xxv. 33). They above all desired burial in the family sepulchre, which was often situated near the home of the living (cf. the phrase "gathered to his fathers"). As late as Jeremiah, in the picture of Rachel weeping for her children, the thought finds touching expression that the departed have still a keen interest

in the fortunes of posterity (xxx. 15). The continued existence of the shades depends on the pious care of survivors, a fact which in part explains the passionate intensity of a Hebrew's longing for children. Possibly "the yearly sacrifice for all the family" mentioned in 1 Sam. xx. 6 was offered at the ancestral grave, and teraphim may have been images of dead forefathers placed at the entrance of the house (Gen. xxxi. 19; 1 Sam. xix. 13).

Certain recent inquirers, led by Stade and Schwally, believe that traces of the primitive worship of the dead are discoverable in ancient Hebrew religious practice. In proof they point to regular mourning customs—cutting the flesh, throwing dust on the head, fasting, the sanctity of tombs. It does seem as if certain forbidden usages, like cutting the hair for the dead (Lev. xxi. 5) or funeral feasts (Jer. xvi. 7), indicated the prevalence of some such cult. From the outset, however, the new Jahweh-religion raised a protest, with that intolerance of every rival that marks living religious conviction. As it has been put: "No man can serve two masters, and it was impossible to serve Jahweh and the spirits of the dead . . . Israel was felt to be a people holy to Jahweh, *i. e.* set apart exclusively to His worship—this was the fundamental principle—and the tombs, which were holy once, were, like everything else connected with death, gradually declared unclean."<sup>1</sup>

Important modifications in Hebrew thought were due to the inflow of ideas from surrounding nations. At the occupation of Canaan, Israel found there a population which had long been subjected to Babylonian influences, and of this one result appears to have been the displacement of older

<sup>1</sup> Bertholet, *Die israelitischen Vorstellungen vom Zustande nach dem Tode*<sup>2</sup>, 39.

notions of the family sepulchre by the idea of Sheol, or the shade-realm. Sheol is described in Job xxx. 23 as "the house of meeting for all living," and was thought to be located in the depths of earth: it is lower even than the waters under the earth (Job xxvi. 5), and to it the dead "go down." Babylonians and Hebrews apparently considered Sheol to be a huge underground cavern corresponding to the space above between earth and firmament, and men are precipitated thither by the earth opening beneath their feet (Num. xvi.). But at times Sheol and the grave were not clearly distinguished. Terrible representations of its nature are given. A famous description is that of Job x. 22: "A land of thick darkness, as darkness itself; a land of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkness." None can escape its power (Ps. lxxxix. 48). The praise of God is silent there (Isa. xxxviii. 18), and existence is but a dreary shadow of life, bereft of communion with the living, whether man or God. Even the despairing rarely wish for death. Distinctions prevailed among the dead, but they were social distinctions, not moral; on righteous and wicked equally falls a common doom. Existence moves on in a faint reproduction of former earthly relationships, as when Samuel still wears a mantle or kings still sit upon thrones (Isa. xiv. 9). No man has ever returned from Sheol, for although the psalmist gives thanks to the Lord who has brought up his soul from Sheol (Ps. xxx. 3), and Hezekiah is rescued from the pit of corruption (Isa. xxxviii. 17), these expressions plainly allude neither to resurrection nor to a blessed life beyond the grave, but to escape from menacing death. Viewed as a whole, the doctrine of Sheol is but a relic of heathenism, void of moral or religious significance, and inexpressibly sombre.

This may seem unintelligible in a religion so

deeply hopeful as the faith of the Hebrew prophets. It must be remembered, however, that so far we are dealing with that faith at a comparatively early stage of its career, and in addition that as yet the individual counted for amazingly little in contrast to the nation. Solace for personal eclipse was found in the prospect of national felicity. Yet even the promises held out to Israel had their drawbacks. Only a "remnant" should enjoy the good time coming. And these survivors themselves are promised no more than what was, according to contemporary ideas, a completely happy *earthly* life. They will live long, but not for ever (Isa. lxx. 20). Thus far, then, no satisfaction had been found for the slowly rising demand of faith that fellowship with God, gained and consolidated in life, should not at death be broken off for ever. We shall see that eventually the belief was attained that the state of Sheol must be overleaped, and the believer "received" at death by God Himself. That, however, was the final stage of a chequered development.

Originally, we must note, Sheol was not conceived as lying within the jurisdiction of Jahweh. He ruled in Palestine, therefore over men only as long as they lived there. He is nowhere said in the earliest literature to visit Sheol or control its affairs, and those who descend to the grave pass out of His authority. Now while Jahwism remained simply monolatrous, and still fell short of monotheism proper, the old heathen eschatology persisted alongside of it, without much friction or collision; but with the advent of true monotheism, for which Jahweh was the one God ruling over all things whatsoever, in life or death, a sharp antagonism became inevitable. It developed slowly. First came the suppression of the worship of the dead and the eradication of necromancy. Devotion once given to ghosts was



claimed for Jahweh alone. Prophetic religion next went the length of representing the shades as totally devoid of feeling and knowledge. We can see that if a spiritual doctrine of immortality was ever to strike root, the ground must be cleared of the wholly unmoral conception of Sheol : negation must prepare the way for full assertion. But, as Dr. Charles has said, "while Yahwism was destroying the belief in the false life in Sheol, it was steadily developing in the individual the consciousness of a new life and of a new worth through immediate communion with God, as we see in the Psalms and kindred literature."<sup>1</sup> Men were learning that the only irrefragable assurance of a blessed life after death springs from a *present* experience of fellowship with God. To make way for this, the dreary animistic creed about Sheol and its shadowy denizens must perish.

The rise of faith in a blessed future connected itself also with the baffling problem of rewards and punishments. If Jahweh is perfectly righteous and powerful, as the Jewish prophets of the seventh century taught, and if as yet true immortality had not risen on the horizon, it followed that righteous and wicked alike must be recompensed in this life, or not at all. The new individualism, advocated by Jeremiah and Ezekiel, helped to weaken the older theory, according to which the sinner's punishment or the righteous man's reward came not perhaps on himself, but certainly on his family or tribe. It was now held that every one received in this life the exact reward of his deeds (Ezek. xviii. 5-32). The same view finds expression in the Psalms (xxxiv. and xxxvii.), Proverbs, and in the speeches of Job's friends (iv. 8; viii. 20). Presently it was felt to be unsound. As Jeremiah puts it boldly : "Righteous art thou, O Lord : I

<sup>1</sup> *Immortality* (Drew Lecture), 10.

would reason the cause with thee; wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?" (xii. 1). Various attempts were made to accommodate the theory to facts. It was conceded in the Psalter that the righteous often suffer grievously, but then it is by way of discipline, not retribution, and the end is always peace; while if the godless flourish, it is for a season only, that their punishment may be the more condign. As long as prophets held, as Ezekiel did, that no conscious life exists in Sheol, those who believed passionately in righteous Jahweh had no alternative but to say that His mind concerning the righteous, which He must express, *is* expressed fully on this side of death. Now the religious implications of this position for a good man long tried by calamity were so grave that it cannot but excite surprise that the thought of recompense *beyond death* was so late in making its appearance. Why was not the principle applied—it is as old as Amos ix. 2—that Jahweh's power extends to Sheol? Instead of that, the vision of divine ubiquity and omnipotence appears only to have quickened the Hebrew sense of man's frailty and transience, from which it was but a short step to the abandonment of the belief that individuals receive their deserts even in the present life. "It is all one; therefore, I say, He destroyeth the perfect and the wicked" (Job ix. 22). And the writer of Ecclesiastes, pursuing the same line even farther, substitutes for a tottering faith a scepticism so despairing that it blots out retribution both here and hereafter (Eccles. iii. 19 ff.).

But it is darkest just before dawn; and from the persistent recurrence of Job to the thought that death ends all, it looks as if an implicit protest against it were on the point of passing into rejection. His faith, like true faith everywhere, longed most of all not for *his* vindication, but for *God's* vindication as absolutely righteous; and this not



merely in the subjective experience of man, but openly and in reality. God must be justified before the whole world, in ways all can understand. Hence, while he is wrestling with the mystery of suffering, the idea of resurrection looms before him for one moment (xiv. 13-15). What if man should die and live again! The thought passes, only to recur with deepened emphasis. This is the famous passage (xix. 25 ff.) beginning, "I know that my Redeemer liveth." He has now reached definite conviction, but it is essential to mark precisely what the conviction covers. In the words of Dr. Charles, "Job declares that God shall appear for his vindication . . . further, that he shall himself witness this vindication, and enjoy the vision of God. But we cannot infer that this divine experience would endure beyond the moment of Job's justification by God. It is not the blessed immortality of the departed soul that is referred to here, but its entrance into and enjoyment of the higher life, however momentary its duration. The possibility of the continuance, much less of the unendingness, of this higher life does not seem to have dawned on Job, though it lay in the line of his reasonings. If it had, it could not have been ignored throughout the rest of the book. Nevertheless the importance of the spiritual advance here made cannot be exaggerated."<sup>1</sup> The possibility has also to be reckoned with that what is in contemplation is a return to life *on earth*. But the new hope is not a simple postulate springing from the desire for recompense; in part, at least, it is the outcome of the realised meaning of communion with God. Interpreters disagree on the question whether in Pss. xvi., xvii., xlix. and lxxiii. the faith in a blessed life after death is definitely asserted, but the

<sup>1</sup> *Immortality*, 19-20.

interpretation of at all events the last two in that sense is extremely probable. What is certain is that they contain such an assurance of possessing God, and of being possessed by Him, as implicitly embraces trust in a continued fellowship beyond the grave. For those who knew God, the pit of corruption or the dim quasi-existence of Sheol could not be the end of all.

It was necessary to effect a conjunction of this individual aspect of the development with the national expectation of a Messianic age, and the first attempt at a synthesis appears in the hope of *resurrection*. This, of course, means the resumption of *earthly* life, and the limitations inseparable from the thought in its original historic sense must be borne well in mind. Strong evidence exists for the hypothesis that the idea of resurrection entered the Hebrew mind from Persia. Formerly it had been believed that the Messianic Kingdom would be shared only by the living, but in a passage dating from the late Persian period (Isa. xxvi. 19) the scope of the Kingdom is significantly expanded to embrace the righteous dead: "Thy dead shall arise; the inhabitants of the dust shall awake and sing for joy; for a dew of lights is thy dew, and the earth shall produce the shades." The individual, that is, participates fully in the blessed life only in a blessed community. A further advance is made in the Book of Daniel, which declares that "many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (xii. 2). The statement is not universal; it is concerned solely with "many," whether martyrs or apostates. Good and evil must alike return to earth for the due reward of their deeds. It has been pointed out above that towards the close of the second century B.C. the belief took possession of influential apocalyptic minds that

earth is unfit to be the scene of an eternal kingdom, which could only become real under transcendent heavenly conditions (1 Enoch lxxxiii.-xc.; cf. 1 Macc., Pss. of Solomon, and the Book of Wisdom).

In these and other extra-canonical books, written by seers and mystics of pre-Christian Judaism, resurrection is appointed to all the dead, Sheol thus ceasing to be more than a temporary place of detention where men await judgment.<sup>1</sup> Modern research has brought out the immense religious value of this apocalyptic type of literature, and the steps by which it developed views of the future which are truly elevated and relatively harmonious. To begin with, moral distinctions were introduced into Sheol. It seemed incredible that believing souls would be left for centuries in oblivion and darkness before their communion with God was re-established; and accordingly both righteous and wicked are described as already receiving in Sheol a foretaste of their lot (so in the oldest part of the Book of Enoch, dated perhaps 135-105 B.C.). Sheol is now an abode in which ethical principles rule, and where God's hand still rests on each soul for blessing or curse. Almost invariably none but the righteous rise, with the result that Sheol increasingly becomes a place appropriate only for the wicked, a place indeed of ceaseless torture; and the next inevitable step in development is the great thought that pious souls altogether overleap Sheol and at death pass instantly to the bliss of God's presence.<sup>2</sup> This is distinctly taught in the part of Enoch known as the Similitudes (xxxvii.-lxx.), and belonging to the first half of the first

<sup>1</sup> Professor Burkitt (*Jewish and Christian Apocalypses*, 1914) considers that the doctrine of a last judgment is the dominating idea in Apocalyptic and that it is original.

<sup>2</sup> Jesus' promise to the penitent malefactor is, "To-day thou wilt be with Me in Paradise."

century B.C. There is reason to suppose that the whole movement of thought has been affected by Greek speculation regarding the immortality of the soul, mediated to Palestine through Alexandria. But efforts to combine Greek ideas with the purely Jewish belief in resurrection had to face the difficulty that retribution at death—the Hellenic view—appeared to make resurrection unnecessary; and in the Book of Wisdom (possibly in part 50–30 B.C.) resurrection is nowhere mentioned, but the faithful rise after death to immediate rewards, while the evil undergo perpetual torment. “The Hebrew doctrine of resurrection and the Greek doctrine of immortality existed side by side in Jewish thought at the beginning of the Christian era, and no satisfactory method of harmonising them was devised.”<sup>1</sup>

We have already seen how the Sadducees refused to advance beyond the pre-exilic doctrine of Sheol, turning a deaf ear to the later revelations or discoveries of faith. When Jesus came, the Pharisees perpetuated much of the loftiest faith attained in the long rich past, and it was natural that many of them should pass into the Christian society.

As we review this long development, which has found its highest point in the assurance of a blessed future life with God, in a new heaven and a new earth, we are led to specify certain great religious gains.

(a) What generates the true eschatology is religious experience. Religion is hope, and all substantial hope is religion. The path to conviction followed by Hebrew thought was not that of speculative reason applied to the general data of life: it was the gradual realisation of the

<sup>1</sup> Paton, *The Hebrew Idea of the Future Life* (a reprint of articles in the *Biblical World*, 1910), p. 351.

spiritual content involved in a certain selected portion of experience, viz. fellowship with God. This is, in fact, the method by which the certainty of perfect life after death was reached, and it must always be kept by the means that won it. The assurance of immortality is not a rational induction, like the laws of science, which, once they have been formulated exactly, can be written out and handed on to posterity in this form. We reach it by an act of faith. In view of God, we dare to believe in the life everlasting, as did the great post-exilic believers. /

(b) No eschatology counts but one which is ethical from end to end. Eschatological belief as such need have in it nothing ethical; selfish hedonism may dictate much of its form and content. Always it derives its character from the God whose gift is life, and in whose fellowship eternal life consists. The differential feature of Hebrew faith in immortality is its correlation with ethical monotheism. /

(c) The hope in which Hebrew religion rested is not that of a purely individual experience. What is longed for is a *kingdom*—a community of redeemed men, where God dwells. No man is blessed in isolation from his fellows. /

(d) The two conceptions, eschatology and history, are as inseparable as concave and convex. The prophets first proclaimed the idea of universal human history—in which the fortunes of Israel are the fortunes of mankind—in virtue of a perception that God is executing a redemptive purpose on earth, which will throw its results far on into the future. Just because the living God, holy and merciful, is acting now, He will continue to act, and one day He will utterly prevail. He will bring in the perfect order, in which His righteous love will have free course. It is this faith in the End that enables men to envisage the

human past not as a mere stream of aimless change, but as history. The course of the world is the judgment of the world, but to see this the whole must be read from the vantage-ground of faith in a consummation. ,

## CHAPTER III

### THE ESCHATOLOGY OF JESUS

It may not be unnecessary to guard ourselves, at the outset, against the idea that there exists a group of beliefs, known as "New Testament eschatology," to which as Christians we are under obligation to give assent. Only confusion can result from a failure to distinguish what is biblical and what is of faith. The latter is at once less and more varied than the former. It is less, for certain details in the varied Biblical pictures of the last things—survivals, most of them, of alien pre-Christian elements—are now of purely historic interest; it is more, for the fundamental convictions of New Testament hope are applicable to problems which had not confronted the apostolic mind. Further, the New Testament contains no single fixed technical eschatology. The representations of St. Paul, for example, will not easily combine at all points with those of the Fourth Gospel. What we actually find is a few basal certainties with a variable dress of traditional imagery, the materials of which, especially in fuller delineations, have often been drawn from the stores of Jewish Apocalyptic. Old conceptions like Hades, Paradise, Day of the Lord, etc., reappear though baptised in a new spirit. The marks of the apocalyptic tradition are plainly visible in such passages as Mark xiii., 2 Thess. ii., and 2 Pet. ii. But after all these things are of subordinate importance. Starting with



the thought of Jesus, our business is to ascertain the great religious convictions about the future and the unseen world to which the New Testament mind gave expression in the terms and symbols of its age. Eschatology, for the first Christians, was the very air they breathed, the source of triumphant inspiration in life and death.<sup>1</sup> If our faith is continuous with theirs, we must have access to the same fountain of believing hope.

In the year A.D. 29 John the Baptist came forward in Judæa with the startling announcement: "The Kingdom of heaven<sup>2</sup> is at hand" (Matt. iii. 2). In the very near future, he declared, the forecast of the prophets would be accomplished, and God would take the government of earth into His own hands. The final cataclysm had always presented two aspects to the seer's eye—menace and promise. Both are found in the Baptist's message, the note of judgment predominating. None can enter the Kingdom without repentance, for, as was invariably the case in prophetic anticipations, it is again declared that the establishment of the Kingdom will be preceded by the Messianic judgment, sifting wheat from chaff. No highly coloured apocalyptic pictures have a place in John's message, no dreams of national supremacy. Filled with an overwhelming sense of the divine majesty, he thunders forth a demand for contrition and reformation while there is yet time. His work is that of preparation. Already a greater One is at the door, who will execute the divine will (Mark i. 7).

<sup>1</sup> "It is more than a mere paradox to say that the first thing in the Gospels is their conception of the last things" (Moffatt, *Theology of the Gospels*, 47).

<sup>2</sup> So Matthew; Mark and Luke say "the Kingdom" or "the Kingdom of God." It has not been proved that the difference of phrase is significant.



The message of the Baptist, as well as its outcome in a popular revival of religion, shows how intensely the air of Palestine was charged with eschatology. With all its fanaticism, the Jewish hope possessed a kernel of priceless truth that attracted Jesus of Nazareth; and according to the evangelists, He began His own public ministry, after His baptism, by reiterating John's very words (Mark i. 15). He too proclaimed the great tidings that the Kingdom of God, long promised and passionately looked for, is at the threshold. The time is fulfilled, the age of the last things is begun. For Him also, as for John, the Kingdom cannot arrive without an introductory judgment, yet on His lips "the gospel" is primarily a word of grace and life. It implies forgiveness, victory over sin and death, the liberation of a world prostrate under hostile diabolic agencies, the establishment of a perfect order in which the righteous love of God will have complete expression. It is clear that Jesus—in this respect countersigning the hopes of later Jewish faith—beheld this final realization of the Reign of God as projected into a new transfigured heavenly world (Mark xii. 25); but His teaching is as devoid of those laboured eschatological calculations or minutely descriptive pictures of transcendent scenery in which Apocalyptic loved to indulge as it is of political or nationalist ideas. What He knew with certainty was that in spite of all obstacles of man or nature the Lord of heaven and earth purposed to accomplish fully His glorious plan of world-renovation. Everything rests on the infinite power of God.

At this point we encounter a difficult and important problem, much canvassed in recent years. The staple of Jesus' teaching admittedly concerns the Kingdom or Reign of God, but by that term does He intend a future fact, which is relegated exclusively to the new transcendent sphere of the

Coming Age, or is it real even now among men in such a fashion that He can actually convey to them a present share in its divine benefits? If we define the Kingdom provisionally, in Wendt's careful phrasing, as "a divine dispensation under which God would bestow His full salvation upon a society of men who on their part should fulfil His will in true righteousness," is this Kingdom, for the mind of Jesus, present or future? In the terms of recent Synoptic controversy, does Jesus conceive the Kingdom in a purely ethical or spiritual way, or is it for Him rigidly eschatological?

(1) Scholars as different as Haupt and Wellhausen have maintained that the prominence of eschatology in Jesus' teaching as we have it must be traced to later influences. To Him, Wellhausen thinks, the Kingdom was "a principle working invisibly in the hearts of individuals." It is improbable that Jesus ever claimed to be Messiah. Passages in which He identifies Himself with the heavenly Son of man familiar from Jewish Apocalyptic, or predicts His own advent on the clouds of heaven, belong to the later Messianic eschatology of the Church. His interest lay elsewhere. What He cared for was purity of heart, true worship, the service of man in fraternal love. He sought to inaugurate a religious regeneration (or a moral regeneration animated by religion) chiefly by winning individuals. The moral content of His teaching about the Reign of God in human life wholly overshadowed the eschatological aspect of that conception; the disciples, on the other hand, began after His death to proclaim the eschatological hope with fervid intensity. They first attributed to Jesus prophecies about His own death and resurrection, as well as a claim to have destroyed the rule of Satan.

In reply to this, it has been justly pointed out,

the eschatological strain in Jesus' teaching, though accentuated in later days (cf. Matt. vii. 21 with Luke vi. 46),<sup>1</sup> is too pervasive and characteristic to be disposed of so easily. We have seen that He began His ministry with a word fitted to stir expectation: "The Kingdom of God is at hand." That He believed Himself to be Messiah is clear from many sayings and acts: pre-eminently from His message to the Baptist in prison (Matt. xi. 2 ff.), from the scene at Cæsarea Philippi (Mark viii. 27 ff.), and from His Messianic entry into Jerusalem (Mark xi.). But to be Messiah signified a great deal more than to be a moral and religious Reformer of this present world; the Messiah was God's agent in establishing the perfect final order, completely expressive of the divine mercy and righteousness, by sudden revelation and judgment. And of this perfect dispensation Jesus often speaks in the future tense. "Thy kingdom come," He bids the disciples pray (Matt. vi. 10). "There be some here of them that stand by," He predicts, "who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the Kingdom of God come with power" (Mark ix. 1). Entrance into the Kingdom is referred to as a future event (Matt. vii. 21; Mark ix. 47). In instituting the Supper He declares: "I will no more drink of the fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new in the Kingdom of God" (Mark xiv. 25). It is as preparatory to the Kingdom that the Gospel is preached, and its nearness and certainty are at once an appeal to the unheeding and a consolation of the faithful. Nothing is too great to be asserted of the approaching dispensation. It is not spiritual merely, but an order which embraces and satisfies man's whole being—a new heaven and a new earth, in which all the death and suffering of the present age, as

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Moffatt, *op. cit.*, 72 ff.

well as sin, shall be abolished for ever. God will break in with omnipotent majesty, bringing history to a close, in modes which human co-operation in no way affect. The Kingdom will come suddenly, like a thief in the night. As it has been expressed: "We have not to work for it, or set it up by our efforts; we have to wait for it, to be ready for it, to make any sacrifice to secure our entrance into it." There can be no question that the main eschatological ideas of Mark xiii. go back to Jesus.

It is impossible, then, to restrict Jesus' conception of the Kingdom to a purely ethical or spiritual sphere. It is never identified with the righteous: it is a condition, an order, in which the righteous live. It is future and destined to arrive at the conclusion of the present age, an object therefore of prayer, hope and yearning. But is it *merely* future?

The argument that Synoptic eschatology is mostly the offspring of later reflection hardly bears the light of criticism.<sup>1</sup> The later Gospel sources are not more eschatological than the earlier. On the contrary, Mark contains more eschatology than the collection of Jesus' sayings usually named Q. Moreover, it is difficult to give convincing reasons for the universal belief in a speedy consummation which prevailed throughout the apostolic age, except on the hypothesis that Jesus had Himself expressed the same hope.

<sup>1</sup> "Far from intensifying the eschatological elements, we have clear evidence that Christian theology softened and spiritualised them. We find unmistakable proof of this when we compare the earlier and later epistles of St. Paul, and the process of spiritualisation reaches its climax in the Fourth Gospel. The probability is that our synoptic Gospels have toned down rather than exaggerated the eschatological statements which they found in their sources" (Professor Andrews, in *London Theological Essays*, 73).

(2) The rigidly eschatological interpretation. This theory, according to which Jesus regarded the Kingdom as purely future and abruptly supernatural, is associated in its extreme form with the name of Schweitzer. He maintains that in Jesus' teaching the Kingdom is not even dynamically present, but everything is projected into the Coming Age. The advent of the better dispensation will consist in a violent catastrophe, or series of catastrophes, breaking up the present order. It is incorrect, therefore, to say that Jesus *founds* the Kingdom, since it is only and altogether future; what He does is to predict its extreme nearness, and wait, along with the rest of the world, for God to bring in the Kingdom supernaturally. So close at hand was the great divine event that He looked for it before the return of the Twelve from their preaching mission (Matt. x. 23). Then when they returned, and the End tarried, He travelled north seeking solitude. He had come to believe that His death would constitute an atonement such as to enable God to remit the great tribulation that must usher in the Messianic age; and He eagerly anticipated that, either at the moment of dying or on the third day after death, He would attain a supernatural form of being, be invested with Messianic glory, and bring in the end of all things, the judgment and the Kingdom. Events took another course. Going up to Jerusalem, He there met His doom, and expired with a cry of despair.

Schweitzer's work, and particularly that of J. Weiss, to whom he is largely in debt, has been of value in calling attention to neglected elements in the teaching of our Lord; but as it stands, it resolutely ignores one half of the facts. It takes no account of a whole important group of sayings in which the Kingdom is described as *present*. Take, for instance, Matt. xii. 28: "If I by the

Spirit of God cast out dæmons, then the kingdom of God has already reached you." Surely this is quite plain. The Kingdom has arrived. A new power has actually entered the world, defeating the powers of evil, demonstrating the advent of the expected age. Indeed, what differentiates Jesus from all others is that He not merely announces the Kingdom as close at hand, but offers to men, in His own person, a present share in its divine eternal blessings. Equally direct is His statement about the Baptist, that "he that is least in the Kingdom of heaven is greater than he; and from the days of John the Baptist until now the Kingdom of heaven suffers violence and the violent press into it" (Matt. xi. 11 f.). Men, that is, are actually storming the Kingdom with prevailing power. Similarly, the Parables of Growth (Matt. xiii. 24 ff.) indicate a process already going on, though with emphasis on the fact that it will terminate in a great climax. Other passages, which we cannot pause upon, are Matt. xiii. 16 f.; Luke xvii. 20 f.; Mark xii. 34; ii. 19; iii. 26. What these words breathe is not yearning for something still to come, but a joyful sense of possession, of God's presence in its fulness. No doubt only the beginnings are real so far, but these beginnings are decisive. This utter confidence of Jesus that in Him the Kingdom was present and actual, is rooted firmly in His filial consciousness of the Father's indwelling power. He knows that in His person all promises have been made good.

Enough has now been said to prove how impracticable the theory is which explains everything in our Lord's teaching in terms of eschatology. After all, He brought men to repent by giving them a new sense of God, which filled them with the joy of redemption as an experience. His teaching, that is, has for its centre not any



presentation of the future, but the Father. How large a proportion of His teaching is intelligible and precious quite apart from the question how soon the Kingdom will be perfected! How little His warnings depend for their force on eschatology! The whole conception of an *Interimsethik*—an ethics preparatory for entrance to the Kingdom rather than characteristic of its members, and hence adapted to an interval of waiting which in all likelihood will be short—is totally irrelevant to most things in the Sermon on the Mount and to the principles of judgment outlined in Matt. xxv.

These two conceptions, of the Kingdom as future and as present, are equally and ineradicably combined in the mind of Jesus, as expressed in His words.<sup>1</sup> The attempt has been made to reduce the apparent contradiction by using the contrast of essence and appearance, content and form, or by referring each of the two conceptions to a different period of His life. But the solution is rather to be found in the Person of Jesus, His Messianic mission and personality. Where He is, there is the Kingdom; and it is His distinction that He belongs at once to present and to future. By His appearance, the world-renovation has received its initial impulse; and the Father who has given the beginning will also through Him complete the Kingdom at the end.

We are endeavouring to ascertain Jesus' mind concerning things to come, and one fact of great

<sup>1</sup> If this is an antinomy, it is in unison with all deep faith. The wall of partition between ethical and eschatological is so thin as to collapse instantly when the soul has become suffused with keen religious feeling. The present is only intelligible in view of the end, and this an end for the universe equally with the soul; nor would the end stand in any intelligible relation to life unless even in its transcendence it were continuous by spiritual quality with actual experience.

importance is the group of sayings attributed to Him which foretell His resurrection. Taking the three prophecies of His passion (Mark viii. 31; ix. 31; x. 33 f.), we find that each contains the assurance that He will rise after death. Similar indications occur elsewhere. It is at first sight tempting to regard these passages, one and all, as insertions of a later time; but the expedient is forbidden by the single consideration that His prophecies of His own death are much too firmly embedded in the story to be displaced, and that if He spoke of His death, He must inevitably have looked beyond it to victory. Death must signify one of two things: the total defeat of His mission, or a means to the full triumph of the Kingdom. But His trust in the Father made the first of these alternatives an impossibility. He knew that death could not hold Him, for He was on His Father's business. No doubt the language in which His forecast of resurrection is couched may exhibit the faint influence of certain passages in the Old Testament, such as Hos. vi. 2. But the fact of His expectation still remains.

Furthermore, upon resurrection there was to follow His Return in glory. The question of His second advent, or Parousia, is not precisely the same as that of the present or future nature of the Kingdom, and in consequence the two must be studied apart. It is an indubitable element of the Synoptic tradition that Jesus foretold His return to consummate the kingdom of God already founded by His saving presence among men. The clearest of all statements is one uttered before the high priest: "Ye shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming with the clouds of heaven" (Mark xiv. 62). The frequent occurrence in this connexion of the title "Son of man," which Jesus took from Dan. vii. 13 and



used to denote a career of utter humiliation leading up to transcendent glory, should not be missed. Thus at or shortly after the scene at Cæsarea Philippi we read : "The Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then shall He render unto every man according to his deeds" (Matt. xvi. 27). With this we may compare Mark viii. 38 and Luke ix. 26 f.; also the small apocalypse in Mark xiii., and the Parable of the Tares (Matt. xiii. 37-43). One very emphatic strain in His teaching on this subject is the inculcation of vigilance and fidelity. The Parousia will overtake the world as a snare (Luke xxi. 34). "Be ye also ready, for in an hour that ye think not the Son of man cometh" (Luke xii. 40) is the keynote of such parables as the Watchful Servants and the Ten Virgins.

Professor Andrews, in the exceptionally valuable essay just quoted, has pointed out the impossibility of regarding explicit references to the Parousia either as later additions to the narrative or as merely survivals of Judaism in the thought of Jesus, or as veiled predictions of the future history of the Church—modes, that is to say, of foretelling the Resurrection or Pentecost. His own view is that the Parousia sayings represent a later phase of the teaching of Jesus, whereas "at the beginning of His career Jesus looked upon preaching as the mission of His life." There was a period of popularity and triumph, but it could not last. The hope of rapid success died out; then came a crisis of disillusionment. Jesus came to be convinced that something other than preaching was needed to establish the Kingdom, and this He found in the twofold certainty of His death and the subsequent glorious manifestation of the Parousia. And yet, despite the fact that the majority of the Parousia predictions do occur

near the close of our Gospels,<sup>1</sup> such a theory of development, or rather revolution, in the mind of Jesus appears to be somewhat precarious, because insufficiently supported by the facts. The chronology of the Gospels is notoriously uncertain. Not only so, but the experience of all true prophets must have prepared Jesus from the very outset to believe that a vocation like His would involve suffering and even death (cf. Mark ii. 19-20); and if He did see death awaiting Him, faith in God could not but assure Him that He would nevertheless in person complete the Kingdom He had inaugurated, that the Kingdom was sure of a glorious consummation of which in spite of death He, and no other, would be mediator beyond the grave. Eschatology, in short, was vital to the prophetic thought; and on this score alone we are justified in holding that the Parousia conception was in no sense a refuge from disillusionment, but an original element of His Messianic consciousness. As man, He thought in the categories current in His day, although He never became their victim. The apocalyptic ideas of Jewish eschatology were the only forms in which Jesus' faith in His own divine work could find expression.

But though we have been compelled to dissent from Professor Andrews' theory regarding Jesus' adoption of the Parousia conception, we may well accept him as our guide in elucidating the significance of the Parousia utterances for the modern mind. "They illustrate," he writes, "the indestructibility of the Christian Hope which triumphs over all difficulties and faces the future with serenity. They provide a sure foundation and basis for this Hope by resting it on the sacrifice of Christ, and so rescue it from the suspicion that

<sup>1</sup> See a useful list of passages in Muirhead, *Eschatology of Jesus*, 218-19.

it is merely a vague and shallow optimism. They imply a transcendental conception of the Person of Christ by portraying Him as Lord of the future, seated at the right hand of God and swaying the destinies of the human race. And, finally, they teach us that the kingdom of God must come from God and cannot be evolved by man."

Certain texts appear to indicate an intense belief on Jesus' part that the Parousia would arrive speedily. The language of Matt. xvi. 28 is unambiguous: "There be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in His kingdom." And in Mark xiii. 30, after an enumeration of signs presaging the Return, it is said: "This generation shall not pass away, until all these things be accomplished." On the other hand, slight indications that the interval might be a long one occur in some parables, *e. g.* Luke xii. 45: "If that servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming"; with which we ought to take Matt. xxv. 19: "Now after a long time the lord of those servants cometh." The End seems to be postponed to a quite indefinite distance in the Parable of the Seed (Mark iv. 26-29). And a phrase employed by Jesus in His eulogy of the woman who anointed Him, "Wheresoever the Gospel shall be preached in the whole world" must, if part of the original tradition, be reckoned as proof that in His view the interval preceding His Return would be protracted.

Accepting, then, the Synoptic data as they stand, and putting aside critical views which sacrifice one aspect of the record to the other, we must believe that Jesus' thought of the Parousia varied in different moods. At one time He looks for it immediately, at another He beholds it far away, at a third He distinctly disclaims all knowledge of its day or hour (Mark xiii. 32). Very probably

the first view represents His more habitual attitude; His conception of God's purpose has nothing in common with the modern idea of a gradual evolution. But if He could hold language so diverse, two inferences follow.

(a) To Jesus the date of the Parousia was of inferior importance. When He spoke of it as on the threshold, He spoke in *hope*, not dogmatically, or as a soothsayer. His interest lay not in times or seasons, but in His personal oneness with the Father, whose purpose cannot fail, and whose will to vouchsafe perfect redemption is fixed. His own death could not be the end: the Father must vindicate the Son and bring His work to a triumphant close. Not merely are individuals to be swept into the Kingdom, but the entire present order will be transfigured. When this will be done He is content not to know. It is as in Gethsemane: "Not My will, but Thine." As it has been expressed: "He leaves to the Father the form in which all is to be fulfilled. He only expresses His own opinion that it will happen soon, so that men must be prepared, and that it will be glorious, so that He Himself will be justified even in the eyes of His enemies."<sup>1</sup>

(b) Here, as in His teaching about the Kingdom, Jesus combines two lines of thought present in the loftiest Jewish faith. These two lines, we have seen, are the eschatological and the ethical or inward. On the one hand, grasping with boundless trust the omnipotence of God, He freely uses the language of apocalypse, and asserts the Father's power to give all things to faith *at once*.<sup>2</sup> Elsewhere, His mind rather turns calmly to the principles in which the Kingdom is constituted, and the End falls into the background. To those

<sup>1</sup> Von Dobschütz, *The Eschatology of the Gospels* (1910).

<sup>2</sup> On this aspect of His mind see Prof. A. G. Hogg, *Christ's Message of the Kingdom*, 41 ff.

who find this synthesis of present and future inconceivable, it may be pointed out that it reappears in St. Paul. Apocalyptic hope, in his case, not only tolerated but arose from the recognition that the Kingdom was already an existing fact in Christian experience. These two movements, of possession and of yearning hope, are native to faith, and they are visible in the soul of Jesus. At one time His eye swept forward prophetically, and beheld the End, like the great mountains, very near; at another, He committed all with confidence to God. Just because in His own person the Kingdom is actual now, executing its miraculous regenerative work of giving blessedness to men, Jesus knows that the last consummation will not arrive by magic. It will crown that process of realization which has begun in the experience of believers; nay, it can be hastened by earnest prayer.<sup>1</sup>

The prominence in Jesus' mind of His own approaching return may explain why He seldom speaks about the death of individuals prior to the Parousia, and their passage from earthly to heavenly life. But much is taught by implication.

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Moffatt points out that the uncompromisingly predestinarian view of rigid eschatologists is hopelessly inconsistent with Jesus' emphasis on prayer for the Kingdom as more than resignation to the divine will. The Kingdom is not something prepared already, and only to be awaited in passivity; it is to have a history in which men bear a part. "The command to pray, *Thy kingdom come*, was more than an injunction to breathe a pious sigh for the future. Jesus believed profoundly in the power of prayer to affect even the will of God in the matter of the coming kingdom. . . . The faithful are to wrestle with God for the speedy accomplishment of His purpose; the Fatherly goodness of God and His royal authority forbid prayer becoming a form of dictation or a wild impatient complaint, but they invite the earnest efforts of the faithful to hasten His interposition" *op. cit.*, 58-59).

Thus His conception of God as Father—with a Fatherhood answering to His own blessed experience of Sonship—involved the thought of man as destined for eternal life. Life is, for Jesus, the great good (Matt. xix. 17; Mark viii. 36–37); eternal life is the all-comprehending boon to be enjoyed within the Kingdom of God, so that to enter into or inherit the Kingdom is identical with entering into, or inheriting, life (cf. Mark x. 17 with Matt. xxv. 34 and Mark ix. 43–45 with Matt. xviii. 3). So far from death cutting us off from life, it ushers in the life that is life indeed (Mark viii. 35), for the death we die here is followed by resurrection into an existence with God—an endless experience of blessedness that will not reproduce the sense-experience of earth, but is characterised by higher activities and qualities (Mark xii. 24 f.). Clearly the new element in this thought of life eternal is not its assertion that men survive death in a heavenly existence, as contrasted with a shadowy abode of souls; nor is it the idea that the heavenly life is attained through resurrection. For these aspects of belief were familiar. The novel and decisive feature is Jesus' purely religious intuition of the fact that eternal life is the portion of all who belong to the Father. He never touches upon what are called arguments for the immortality of the soul. And He is silent regarding the soul's inherent nature. For Him it is enough that fellowship with God is itself a relation which, in view of the Father's nature, cannot terminate. "He is not the God of the dead but of the living." The power of God makes new forms of life a possibility; hence the Sadducean argument, based, perhaps ironically, on the materialistic conceptions of the heavenly life cherished by the Pharisees, falls away: and the character of God, as believers know Him, makes it certain that union with Him abides for ever.



In the teaching of Jesus, the Parousia is connected in the closest way with the Last Judgment, and here once more His conceptions reveal affinity with the best Jewish thought. The Day of the Lord had invariably appeared to the prophetic mind as involving the moral terrors of a Great Assize. And to Jesus future judgment is as certain as immortality. In "that day" of universal inquisition, embracing the nations of the past (Matt. xii. 41 f.), the destiny of men will be fixed and their secret thoughts unveiled. In certain passages (*e. g.* Matt. x. 28; xviii. 35) the Judge of the world is God, but more generally Jesus represents Himself as playing a decisive part—acknowledging men before God as His true disciples but denying others, or even, as sole Judge, pronouncing on both classes their final sentence (Matt. viii. 35; xvi. 27). Nowhere in the Gospels is there a more direct expression of His self-consciousness as the future Judge of mankind than Matt. vii. 23: "Then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity." All this is morally authenticated by Jesus' awareness that even now He is judging men—forgiving sin, reprimanding unbelief, urging upon His hearers the one supreme and ultimate decision. As the embodiment of divine righteousness and love He necessarily formed the standard by which is fixed the justification or condemnation of individual lives. As He stood before men, speaking the words of life, His person evoked either faith or resentment; a man's attitude to Him, He perceived, was identical with his attitude to God; and in the End this fact will be not determined but declared.

The standard according to which judgment will then be pronounced is stated clearly in Matt. xxv. 31-46. Whatever elements of the apocalyptic setting may be put to the evangelist's account,

the moral import of the passage harmonises perfectly with our Lord's mind as disclosed elsewhere. In Matt. x. 42 we read that no loving action done to one of His followers for His sake will go unrewarded, but in the picture of the Judgment scene it is further taught that eternal rewards await those who have shown kindness to the poor, suffering sorrow-laden children of men, even though at the time they were unconscious of the fact that their action concerned Jesus. The needy are His brethren and representatives, and loving aid given to them He takes as rendered to Himself. "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye did it unto Me." Thus the all-determining principle or test is a man's deeds as revealing his heart, and as indicative of whether he does or does not possess that spirit, characteristic of Jesus, which impels to disinterested goodness for its own sake. Those will be rejected who have manifested unfitness for the Messianic Kingdom either by an impenitent attitude to Jesus' message, or by a practical negation of His Spirit which belies their external attachment to His person.

The Parable of Dives and Lazarus (Luke xvi. 19-31) teaches that in the world to come the divine judgment on a man's life—which may be very unlike the human estimate—will take concrete form in reward and punishment; it is also suggested that then will be made a complete separation of righteous and wicked. But we ought not to force a doctrine of the Intermediate State out of details in this parable, as though our Lord's purpose had been to give information about Hades. Even had such a thing been consonant with His vocation, we cannot think of Him as imparting a new revelation of things unseen to an audience which was quite probably composed of scoffing Pharisees (v. 14). His sole interest rather



is to teach a great moral principle, and to send it home by the use of vivid familiar imagery. Similarly, the words of Jesus to the penitent malefactor, "To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise," while undoubtedly they convey the promise of translation to a scene of life and peace, yield no theory of what lies behind the veil. It is noteworthy that the term "Paradise" does not occur in Jesus' public teaching. No one, therefore, who wishes to build up a systematic or articulated view regarding an intermediate state between death and the final judgment is entitled to take materials for the structure out of Jesus' recorded words. What He knew, what He said with perfect clearness, is that death cannot separate the devout heart from God, and that the nearness of men to Himself in that eternal Kingdom is somehow conditioned, morally and really, by their unselfish service here (Mark x. 40 ff.). Nor is there any convincing reason why the words of Jesus beside the grave of Lazarus (John xi. 25 f.), to the effect that He Himself mediates to men a resurrection life, should not be regarded as substantially authentic. But, apart from the one saying to the dying thief, He preserves a complete silence on such questions as whether believers remain in Hades until the Parousia, then enter a heavenly sphere, or pass thither immediately after death.

In spite of His trust in God's fatherly love, which seeks the lost unweariedly, the available evidence points to a belief on Jesus' part that some, perhaps many (Matt. vii. 14), would eventually be excluded from the Kingdom. In Mark ix. 47 He definitely refers to the possibility, and the terror, of being cast into Gehenna, the fire of which is unquenchable; and at various points in the Gospels strong metaphors are employed to indicate the awfulness of such a fate—it is to be cast forth into "the outer darkness" (Matt. viii. 12),

where shall be "the weeping and the gnashing of teeth" (Matt. xiii. 42). These images are of course drawn from eschatological tradition, not framed by Jesus, who we may assume was equally alive to their symbolic character with ourselves; but what is unthinkable is that as symbols they were not for Him charged with dire significance. It has been inferred from Mark xii. 25 (cf. Luke xiv. 14; xx. 36), with much plausibility, that in Jesus' view only the just shall rise from the dead, but it is a much too hasty inference that if proved this would have a decisive bearing on the problem of Conditional Immortality or the endlessness of punishment. It is, in fact, irrelevant to these questions, for though the wicked do not rise, they may still have been conceived of as enduring punishment in Hades. We can only register the fact that no positive basis exists in our Lord's teaching for the doctrine of annihilation or the temporary nature of future penalty. "These shall go away into eternal punishment" (Matt. xxv. 46) is too sadly categorical, and an unending vista of dismay is opened up by His word respecting Judas: "Good were it for that man if he had not been born" (Mark xiv. 21). Appeal has been made to a few passages (Luke xii. 47-48; Matt. v. 26; xii. 32) in support of the opinion that Jesus contemplated a finite and limited punishment for certain offenders; but the interpretation is one they will not bear. The teaching of Jesus, *as we have it*, consistently affirms the finality and permanence of future punishment. Universalism does not seem ever to have come before His mind. Probation after this life has left no trace in His words. God is here, and men now live before Him for issues of eternal moment.

Apart, then, from a few passages, at best ambiguous and in any case nullified by many others whose meaning is perfectly explicit, the recorded

belief of Jesus as to the fate of the wicked is unmistakable. But is the record trustworthy? It may be held either that since His true interest centred in the Kingdom, in which the righteous alone shall dwell, He merely permitted Jewish conceptions about the lost to stand, for the sake of emphasis on man's infinite responsibility, or that additions in that sense were made to His actual teaching by later hands. Such arguments are quite legitimate. It is certain they will continue to be put forward, though the present writer does not remember to have seen any theory of the kind which rose above the plane of guess-work. Their real value is that they bid us place the emphasis in the eschatology of Jesus where He placed it—on the final victory of God, when “the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father” (Matt. xiii. 43).

## CHAPTER IV

### ESCHATOLOGY IN THE APOSTOLIC AGE

A BRIEF sketch of eschatological beliefs in the first Christian century must of necessity deal largely in instances or in rough generalisations. The variety of view and attitude is too great for detail. Several distinguishable influences played upon the Christian mind throughout this period, giving form to religious hope; of these the most important are the inherited conceptions of the Old Testament and later Judaism, the Spirit-filled life of believers, and the teaching of Jesus. The form of ideas or of imagery owed most to the first of these three; the decisive content and spirit was in large measure derived from the other two.

As to one aspect of the framework of reflection in this province a single word is desirable. It is known that Jewish eschatology fixes a dividing-line, in the course of things, between two ages or æons—the present and the future. The first is closed, the second inaugurated, by the coming of the Messiah. Now this distinction reappears in the New Testament and retains there the characteristics which formerly belonged to it; that is, the present age is not merely opposed to the future as below is to above, or mundane to transcendent. Its quality too is different: perishable as opposed to imperishable, false to true, bad to good. It is a sphere ruled by diabolic agency, whereas in the Coming Age all the powers

of Satan and his hosts will be destroyed. St. Paul often regards the present age as lasting up to the Parousia, at other times he conceives the Christian as already delivered from its sway and made partaker in the blessings of the world to come.

That the risen and exalted Lord will return in divine glory is a conviction common to all New Testament writers (Acts iii. 21; 1 Pet. iv. 7; 1 Thess. iv. 15; Heb. x. 37; Jas. v. 8; 1 John ii. 18). The world was ripe for downfall: its place would presently be taken by a new world void of sin and of evil which God purposed to introduce by direct operation, sending His Son from heaven. In principle, Christians are *now* members of this new age. One mood constitutes the prevailing undertone of life and work—passionate yearning for the Day that will vindicate faith before the world, instal Christ in full power, and give to His disciples the promised Kingdom. Nothing so well proves the overpowering influence of Jesus, or men's sense of debt to Him, as this estimate of His place in the final scene. Already they knew Him as their Deliverer from sin, and with corresponding intensity they looked for the immediate arrival of the catastrophe, or series of catastrophes, by means of which, having appeared in bodily form, He would close the record of history and bless His people with perfect life.

Now this belief is not gathered out of the air at random, it rests on the fact of the Resurrection. That revolutionising event did not merely help men to conceive the Parousia, but formed a guarantee of its reality. The fulfilment of God's promise had begun. By victory over death Christ had entered on such a career as could only terminate in His complete triumph. By His first advent He had prepared His own way for

the second. Thus many prophetic or apocalyptic expressions which originally pointed to the first coming of the Messiah were carried over, as if by instinct, to His Return. For the present He is in heaven, but the repentance of the people will speedily bring Him to earth again (Acts iii. 20 ff.). Two notable differences mark off the new Christian hope from that of contemporary Judaism. (1) Christians know who the Messiah is; He is Jesus of Nazareth, and it is to Jesus they give the central place in the great event their own generation is to witness. (2) At the judgment instituted by Christ at the Parousia, the test will no longer be adhesion to Israel or submission to the Mosaic law; salvation will depend exclusively on faith in Jesus Christ. Apart from this, virtually all the leading categories of the eschatological scheme were transferred from Judaism to Christian thought—the Parousia, the resurrection, the judgment, etc. The expectation of the Lord's Return does not seem to have been any less vivid or absorbing in Gentile Christian circles. Men lived amid the dawning rays of the New Age, waiting for the full noon. No one, however, ventured to fix the date of the consummation, for the subject was one on which even Jesus had professed ignorance. What was certain was that it would arrive suddenly (1 Thess. v. 2; Rev. iii. 3). We cannot easily over-estimate the importance of this keen longing for the Advent as inspiring the religious zeal and moral discipline of the early Church. True, unwholesome effects were not lacking (2 Thess.). In certain quarters an excited or pedantic tendency arose to calculate the nearness of the end by scrutiny of contemporary incidents, such as plagues or famines, or the harshness of persecution.

This is the temper which we must imagine as pervading the Christian society as a whole. It is not expressed in the New Testament by way of

bare prediction or of writing history in advance, but in order to inspire and console. Always the motive of the eschatology is ethical. To strengthen faith, to reanimate hope, to inculcate patience, to infuse brave and joyous endurance—this invariably is the aim kept in view. The Book of Revelation, with its closing petition, “Come, Lord Jesus,” is in purpose wholly practical: it is meant to impart courage to the persecuted, to fill them with the enthusiastic confidence of triumph so that they may encounter worthily the last great conflict between the Rule of God and the Kingdom of evil, symbolised by and concentrated in Cæsar-worship.

When we turn to St. Paul, we must not speak with exaggeration, as some recent authors have done, of the place of eschatology in his religious life. After all, what occupies the focus of his mind is not hope, but faith—the certainty of redemptive blessings already secured through Christ and present in believing experience. He is sure of reconciliation with God, of forgiveness, of having died and risen with Christ, of the Spirit’s fruits, which are love, joy and peace. What have the last verses of Rom. viii. to do with eschatology? Life in the Spirit is the actual privilege of each Christian man, and the effects of the Spirit are themselves a demonstration that the New Age has begun; old things are passed away, all things are become new (2 Cor. v. 17). We caricature St. Paul if we picture him as looking forward merely. He lives in a present salvation.

Nevertheless, just because redemption is a present fact, still greater redemptive blessings await men in the age to come. What the saints have is the firstfruits and pledge of what they shall receive. If Christ has rescued us from sin, He will go on to abolish ignorance, pain, death.



We have the Spirit of sonship, therefore we wait for the manifestation of the sons of God; we are redeemed, and therefore long for the redemption of our body (Rom. viii. 14, 19, 23). St. Paul can move from past to future by a *fortiori* argument, as in Rom. v. 9 f.: "Much more then, now that we are justified by His blood, shall we be saved by Him from wrath. If we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son when we were enemies, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by His life." Precisely as in the teaching of Jesus—all is present, and yet all is future.

St. Paul's conceptions of the last things do not amount to a set theory. Professor Kennedy, the chief English authority, declares that "it may be said without exaggeration that St. Paul has no eschatology. . . . It is impossible to discover anything in the nature of a system of eschatology, a group of logically related and wholly coherent conceptions of the Last Things."<sup>1</sup> All that can be done now is to indicate some commanding ideas which appear and reappear under a varying dress of symbol.

St. Paul looks for the Parousia of Christ in his own generation. It is to be the next great event of the world's history. At first it is expected within his own lifetime: "We the living, who survive till the Lord comes," he writes in 1 Thess. iv. 15, and it is obvious from 1 Cor. xv. 51 f. that he believed many of the Corinthian Christians would also be alive. Without professing to know the day or hour, he testifies that the End will come like a thief in the night (1 Thess. v. 2 f.). Later, in 2 Cor. v. 1 ff., the apostle contemplates the possibility that he may die before Christ appears; he desires to survive, but some in-

<sup>1</sup> *St. Paul's Conceptions of the Last Things*, 21, 28.



stinct bids him detach faith from so precarious a hope, and he rises up, exultantly, to the assurance that death itself will bring him to Christ's presence. Whether he dies or lives, however, the End is close at hand. In Romans, a later epistle, he can write that "salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed" (xiii. 11), and in Philip-pians, still later, both moods appear side by side. The desire to depart and be with Christ (i. 23) is combined with the temper of anticipation. "We look for the Saviour from heaven" (iii. 20).

There is a corresponding change in his view of death and the sequel. To begin with, the passing of the soul is represented as being followed by an interval of sleep. "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him" (1 Thess. iv. 14). In view of an imminent Parousia it was possible to think calmly of dead saints thus awaiting it. Later, as the Parousia conception became less prominent (not that it ever fell away), the perspective changed. The interval of waiting before Christ's return vanished, and death was followed immediately by presence with the Lord. But the apostle displays no interest in the Intermediate State. As Wernle puts it, "His deep desire simply overleaps all between death and resurrection, and darts forward to its goal—reunion with Jesus."

Many scholars contend that St. Paul's eschatology had a material influence on his ethics, especially in the point of marriage. In 1 Cor. vii. he seems to prefer celibacy, and to rank it as the higher and more excellent state, because "the time is short." But we have also to allow for the possibility that the asceticism of his time may have affected his moral estimates.

It is the rarest thing for him to paint a picture of the Lord's Return; the colours, when he does

so, are directly borrowed from apocalyptic tradition. The voice of the archangel will be heard, and the trumpet will sound, and Christ will descend from heaven with all the saints (1 Thess. iv.; 1 Cor. xv.). On this the living Christians will undergo a supernatural transformation, and the dead will rise, those who are in Christ rising first; "then we, the living who survive, will be caught up along with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air." It appears to be meant that they take their place in His retinue, and return with Him to judgment. "With such scenic and realistic details, drawn from the heterogeneous eschatology of the later Judaism, Paul seeks to make intelligible to his own mind, and to that of his readers, the profound truth that neither death nor any cosmic crisis in the future will make any essential difference to the close relation between the Christian and his Lord."<sup>1</sup>

In 2 Thess. (ii. 1-12), if this letter be his, the apostle advises the Church as to events which must precede the Parousia. The passage is unparalleled in his writings. There will be apostasy in certain quarters, he says, but in particular a personal Antichrist will emerge, usurping the place of God, and, as a kind of satanic Messiah, incorporating every form of impiety. So far this "mystery of lawlessness" has been thwarted and restrained, but when the restraint is taken away, and the impious one in consequence is fully manifested, he will be overthrown by the sudden apparition of Jesus, who shall slay him with a breath. Elsewhere (Rom. xi.) the foretokens of the End to which St. Paul alludes are not the intensification of sin, but the victorious advance of grace, the successful proclamation of the Gospel to the heathen, and the conversion of the Jews.

<sup>1</sup> Moffatt, in *Expositor's Greek Testament*, vol. iii. 38.

Amongst the events implied in, or resulting from, the Parousia of Christ, two are of special importance—Resurrection and Judgment. Under each of these heads, especially that of resurrection, St. Paul sets forth the whole process and significance of final redemption. The resurrection of believers at the End is treated of with a certain fulness in 1 Cor. xv. Doubts on the point had been ventilated in the Corinthian Church, directed either against personal survival as such or simply against the idea of bodily resurrection. In his reply the apostle starts with the resurrection of Jesus, tacitly assuming that what holds true of Him is predicable also of His people. And he buttresses the argument with analogies from nature. Jesus' rising from the grave, he declares, has made our resurrection quite certain. "Christ hath been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of them that are asleep" (v. 20); "as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (v. 23). But this will take place only at the Parousia.

We can scarcely overestimate the religious significance ascribed by St. Paul to the resurrection, and especially to the new spiritual body in which, he taught, believers will then be clad. Here he struck into original lines of thought, thoroughly antagonistic to the crass notions of popular Judaism. In 1 Cor. xv. 37 it is definitely stated that the body laid in the grave will *not* be raised up. Flesh and blood cannot enter the Kingdom. But in spite of this opposition to Judaistic materialism, it is misleading to call the apostle's view simply Greek. The Hellenic conception of the immortality of the soul apart from a body repelled him. If the present physical organism has no part in resurrection, this is not to be identified with a bare doctrine of disembodiment. In reality, St. Paul steers a course

between Judaism and Hellenism, shaping the bold conception of a new spiritual body, now prepared for us in heaven (2 Cor. v. 1 ff.), built on the lines of the radiant risen body of Jesus and linked to the present body not by any physical or semi-physical germ, unfolding to perfection after death, but by the sovereign power of God. He raised no curious questions as to its nature. For him it is enough to believe in the creation of a new organism by the Spirit which should be adequate to the needs of the new life. It is perfectly fitted to reflect the glory of the heavenly life and to serve as instrument of the purity and freedom believers then attain. It is a body of glory—not of decaying flesh, as that of earth had been, but of substance which is all compact of divine radiance, grandeur and power. But of the stages by which this is metamorphosed into that, no hint is given, though the analogy of seed is employed to show that the same vital principle can assume to itself a new organic form when the previous form has perished. To be clothed in this new organism, at the resurrection, is the last stage in the development of a Christian. Probably in this striking idea the apostle to some extent found a solution of that discord in present Christian experience in which “the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh” (Gal. v. 17).

It is manifestly the resurrection of *believers* that bulks most largely in the apostle’s mind. This is natural. He is treating of difficulties felt by Christians about their own destiny or that of departed Christian friends, not theorising in general terms. Moreover, resurrection is in his view effected by the power of the new divine life, mediated by the Spirit inhabiting the nature of the believer, and at this point of view the problem of universal resurrection lay beyond his horizon. That

the wicked will rise is nowhere said expressly. We are left to infer his belief that all will be raised from his emphatic assertion of universal judgment (Rom. ii. 16).

Matters of detail, however, must not hide from us the utter confidence with which St. Paul proclaims eternal life in and with Christ. His tone is calm, exultant, unwavering. He reiterates the deepest intuitions of Old Testament faith echoed by Jesus, to the effect that communion with God can never end (Rom. viii. 38 f.). Death, in that great passage, is the first item in St. Paul's list of things which he is persuaded shall not be able to separate us from the love of God. "To die is gain." "Whether we live or die, we are the Lord's." Remove this prospect, and we are "of all men most pitiable" (1 Cor. xv. 19); we have sacrificed all other good for a hope devoid of legitimate basis and eventual fruition.

The Parousia of Christ also includes the event or process of final judgment upon mankind. Even the idea of justification has an eschatological side, in the sense that it usually involves the thought of ultimate acquittal in the last ordeal. It has been asked whether judgment forms the first act in the drama of the great Day, or is co-terminous with it, as being simply one distinct aspect of the Lord's final conquest of the hostile powers (1 Cor. xv. 24 f.). But these are minor points. What matters is that judgment is the coming of the wrath of God, who will render to every man according to his works (Rom. ii. 5 f.). In some passages the judge is God (Rom. iii. 6); elsewhere Christ is explicitly named; and a reconciliation, or at all events a conjunction of both ideas is made in the statement that "God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ" (Rom. ii. 16). There is no attempt to give a symmetrical view of the entire transaction, but

rather to illustrate this side or that of a fateful truth. The position has been maintained that judgment to come is radically inconsistent with St. Paul's gospel of salvation by faith alone. Is the thought of a future sentence on character and conduct in harmony with, say, Rom. v. 2: "Through Him we have obtained access to this grace wherein we stand, and triumph in the hope of God's glory"? If there be incongruity or paradox, however, it is of a kind that pervades all Christian life. The reality of justification can be attested in no other way than by its fruits in righteous living, and the Christian will therefore always rejoice with trembling as he anticipates the divine scrutiny of his finished life. Precisely the same antinomy runs through the teaching of our Lord, who said not only, "Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom," but also, "When ye shall have done all the things that are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants."

St. Paul has not indulged in any subtle speculations regarding the method or the concomitants of judgment. But it is striking how often he contemplates the judgment of believers. "We shall all stand before the tribunal of God" (Rom. xiv. 10), he writes, and in other places he gives earnest expression to the hope that in the day of Christ the saints may be unreprouable (1 Cor. i. 8; Phil. i. 10). Their acceptance then will be his joy and crown. The work of each builder will be tried by fire; if the structure he has built survives, he will be rewarded; if it is burnt up he will be a loser, though personally he will be snatched out of the flames, and saved (1 Cor. iii. 13 ff.). None the less, the judgment of Christians ends in full redemption. There will be a revelation of the secrets of souls, in all likelihood to the whole world, and human character



will be searched down to its deepest roots; but to this severe experience, of which fire is the emblem, St. Paul would probably have applied the principle enunciated by him in 1 Cor. xi. 32, *a propos* of excesses at the Lord's Supper: "When we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world." Judgment, that is, is not an alternative to mercy, but its instrument and expression. The converse of "salvation" is marked by the sombre word "destruction"; this is the retributive penalty of such as are rejected in the last ordeal, whom St. Paul frequently names "the lost" or "the perishing." Their lot is painted, so to speak, with a single stroke, without elaboration but without reserve; it is "eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of His might" (2 Thess. i. 9). Yet there are passages, dealing with God's final attitude to the world as one of infinite and unconquerable grace, in which St. Paul seems to find it impossible to accept an ultimate dualism and for the time being averts his eyes from the otherwise undeniable facts of persistent human unbelief. The full-toned voice of hope that sounds in Rom. xi. 33 ff., Eph. i. 10, and Phil. ii. 9 ff. would lose something of its depth and power if the thought of eternal punishment prevailed. But this is quite consonant with unswerving belief in judgment to come. Men shall receive according to the things done in the body—that is, we may interpret, not equal rewards or punishments, but those which are proportioned to faithfulness or disobedience on earth.

It has been argued that in 1 Cor. xv. 24 ff., a passage declaring that "Christ must reign till He hath put all His enemies under His feet," an indication is given that during the interval between the Parousia and the final



consummation not only shall hostile angelic powers be destroyed, but all sinners shall bow the knee. But on the second point there is really no explicit teaching. Doubtless the theory cannot be summarily ruled out that in this chapter the doctrine of an intermediate Kingdom is presented, a Kingdom ruled by Christ, His almighty power being exerted for a time in annihilating all His enemies, and death itself as last of all; and that at the conclusion of this period the Son abdicates His throne, retreating thereafter into the depths of the divine life. But the uncertainties of the passage are too many for such constructions. Thus, it is difficult to be sure that St. Paul is really considering separate items in a chronological series, and not rather surveying in foreshortened perspective the universal results of Christ's work, His reign in grace and life. Also, in the statement "Then shall the Son be subjected . . . that God may be all in all," while beyond any question an ultimate dualism is wholly rejected—all things, that is, *must* be to the glory of God the Father (Phil. ii. 11)—it is far from clear that the apostle is contemplating the cessation of Christ's kingship; he may be thinking of its climax. "The end," it has been said, "does not mean the termination of Christ's sovereignty, but the termination of the reign of sin and death." Or even more probably the thought of Christ's self-submission may be a relic of Jewish belief as to the destiny of the Messiah, which the apostle discarded before he wrote Col. i. 16.

Heavenly life, in the consummated Kingdom, is depicted in purely religious terms. Then we shall see face to face (1 Cor. xiii. 12), in unclouded fellowship with Christ or God, believers being conformed in all things to the image of the Son. Human nature, as a totality, will share in that transfiguration, for Christ "shall fashion anew

the body of our humiliation that it may resemble the body of His glory" (Phil. iii. 21). More than this St. Paul does not see, but to faith what he sees is everything.<sup>1</sup>

The synthetic character of the entire representation ought not to be overlooked. The believer is abstracted neither from the environment nor from other men. Thus the apostle will not carry his spiritualisation of eternal life so far as to exclude a glorious transformation of *nature* also at the End. Even the irrational creation shall be redeemed from vanity—that is, from bondage to decay (Rom. viii. 19 ff.), for it was through sin that death, with its corruption, first gained entrance, and its destruction is assured. In the Pauline conception of the consummated order, distinctions between earth and heaven seem to fall away. And again, the emphasis put upon Love as the greatest of abiding things (1 Cor. xiii.), indeed the very thought of a "Kingdom," or a Church which is actually the Body of Christ (Eph. i. 23), brings out the definitely social character by which final salvation is marked; it is a world, or a condition, where blessedness consists in a common divine life. The new humanity will be completely assimilated to Christ the Head, and the whole universe reconstituted in Him who was from the first the vital principle of creation. To proclaim it as God's purpose to "sum up all things in Christ, the things in heaven and the things on earth" (Eph. i. 10), is to plant faith on an unsurpassable height, from which all discord and frustration are beheld as done away for ever, because God is all in all.

Two examples of post-Pauline eschatology follow,

<sup>1</sup> Here, as in the teaching of Jesus, eudæmonistic dreams or standards have no place, the principles guiding the delineation being exclusively religious and ethical.

at the close of the first century and after. The Book of Revelation is a prophetic work throughout: like so many contemporary writings, it outlines in figure "the things which must shortly come to pass" (i. 1). In the foreground there stands the Parousia of Jesus, even yet anticipated with unslackening tenacity and passion. "The time is at hand" (i. 3); "Behold, He cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see Him" (i. 7); "Yea: I come quickly. Amen: come, Lord Jesus" (xxii. 20). Soon He will arrive to judge the world and redeem His own, bringing even to the Churches punishment as well as redemption. The whole is set forth as a revelation given directly by Jesus to the writer. In chapters iv.-xx. a vivid complex representation of coming events is contained, in which apocalyptic imagery woven in the most obscure and varied combinations is so utilised to set forth the significance of present events and impending cataclysms as to prepare the reader's mind for the future, and to stimulate faithful and courageous vigilance. Believers must be on guard against Cæsar-worship, and refuse to adore the imperial image or receive the mark of "the Beast" even at the cost of life (xiii.). So terrible is the coming trial that a great multitude will fall in martyrdom. It is in the light of these "signs of the times" that the writer reads the future. Scenes and visions—into the details of which we need not enter—are so disposed as to quicken a tense anticipation of the End, heralded by episodes of terror and glory. From chapter xv. on, the chief incidents which precede the final transformation are described—the fall of Babylon (*i. e.* Rome), the victory of Christ, and the thousand-year Kingdom. No element in the book left a deeper mark than this inherited conception of a Millennial Reign. It is pictured in chapters xix., xx. When the heaven has opened, and a

Rider on a white horse comes forth at the head of glittering hosts to vanquish the Beast and his armies, Satan the dragon is bound for a thousand years. During this period those who have been martyred for Jesus' sake rise and reign with Him. The thousand years having elapsed, the last fight is fought and Satan destroyed; a new heaven and earth appear, and the visions close with a delineation of the new Jerusalem. One fundamental note runs through every vision—in spite of indescribable tribulations and perils appointed for the Church, its triumph is certain. What masters the author's mind is the appalling fate of earthly Rome and the glorious destiny of the celestial new Jerusalem. It is well known how freely the hymn-writers of the Church have drawn upon the sublime imagery of Revelation, especially in descriptions of heaven and the heavenly life. But despite its inspiring faith, and its adoration of the Saviour, this Christian Apocalypse has too often ministered to hopes and feelings gravely at variance with the Spirit of Jesus.

In 2 Pet. iii. 1-13 the writer confronts boldly a problem which must have pained and confused the Christian mind for decades—the problem of falsified predictions concerning a speedy Advent. By now history had apparently stamped them as mistaken. In the Synoptics there are traces of a tendency to meet the difficulty by softening eschatological prophecies. The writer of Hebrews had encountered similar doubts and misgivings, and 2 Pet. actually quotes the ironic words: "Where is the promise of His coming? For from the day that the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" (iii. 4). The Parousia was continually being promised "soon," but to impatient murmurers it looked farther off than ever. The joy and courage of many vanished. At this transition

time, fraught with danger to the faith, the situation was partly met by those Christian writers who declared that while Parousia and Kingdom might be delayed, nothing important in the Christian hope was really lost. Appearances notwithstanding, it is the last time. And 2 Pet. faces the scoffing heretic with stern assurances that the delay in Jesus' coming is only semblance. "With the Lord one day is as a thousand years." When the day breaks, this old world will be replaced by a new world, the former cosmos perishing in fervent heat. It is a violent but intelligible affirmation that things eternal are in no sense the immanent fruit and outgrowth of time. The new heavens and new earth arrive as the unmediated gift of God.

The student of eschatology in the Fourth Gospel must distinguish clearly two lines of thought. In the first place, a marked tendency exists to transcend or eliminate the apocalyptic matter of primitive tradition. The phrase "Kingdom of God" scarcely occurs, its place is taken by "eternal life." Nearly always this life is set forth as the actual experience of all who put their trust in the unseen Christ, and the future blessings of salvation are mystically transferred into the present life of the believer. The glory of Christ, moreover, is no longer something still to be revealed: it has already been manifested in His career as Giver of life and light—"we beheld His glory, glory as of the only-begotten of the Father" (i. 14). But it is in no sense a merely past fact. Instead, it has been released from the limitations of space and time by His triumph over death, and in consequence the Resurrection has so far displaced the Parousia from the centre of interest.

This change of accent has altered the conception of the Parousia itself. It is not ignored;

but it takes on a more fluid or spiritual form—particularly in the Supper discourses, which have been characterised as “the Johannine counterpart to those Apocalyptic chapters which, in the other Gospels, precede the story of the Passion.”<sup>1</sup> The Church had looked for a Parousia separated by an interval from the exaltation, when Christ should be reunited to His own in circumstances, so to say, of public splendour and glory; the Fourth Evangelist suggests that in a deeper sense the Return has already taken place. By His very rising from the dead Christ came to His people as exalted Lord, to abide with them in uninterrupted fellowship. His presence is one of spiritual communion. “I will not leave you desolate: I come to you” (xiv. 18); “If a man love me, he will keep my word: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him” (xiv. 23). Thus it may be said that for St. John the distinction between Resurrection and Parousia has virtually disappeared. The inspiring and revealing power of the Spirit in Christian hearts is the actual Parousia of the Saviour. Redemption as an experience is placed in the light of this all-important fact. Freedom (viii. 32), peace (xiv. 27), joy (xv. 11) are all present facts, which are mediated to Christ’s followers by His death and invisible return.

Thus life eternal is the equivalent of participation in the being of the spiritual Christ. It is a conception which, as we have already seen, virtually displaces the Synoptic “Kingdom of God.” It is communicated through faith, and to possess it is to be superior even now to all the destructive powers of death, since death becomes only a vanishing moment in life itself. It forms

<sup>1</sup> Scott, *The Fourth Gospel*, 300.



the pre-condition of resurrection, not its result or sequel, for resurrection is simply the completion of the process by which life, flowing from Christ, takes possession of the whole nature of the believer. The epithet "eternal" bears in certain passages the Hellenic sense not of unbeginning and unending time, but of timeless spiritual reality.

Similarly, the idea of judgment is modified and spiritualised into a fact of present experience. The sense of a dramatic cataclysm, at the close of the present age, drops away, and what St. John emphasises is rather "a process of inward discrimination conditioned by the attitude adopted by men to the person of Christ." "This is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light" (iii. 19); or, in still more categorical language, "He that believeth not hath been judged already" (iii. 18). This self-acting condemnation of unfaith and darkness is conditioned by the Spirit's presentation of Christ to men (xvi. 8 ff.). Nothing, apparently, is left over for judgment to come, since the future lot of both types of men, believers and unbelievers, is but an unavoidable result of their inward state. "He that heareth My word . . . cometh not into judgment" (v. 24).

And even resurrection comes forward to the present. The Christian has passed from death into life. The fact that in some sense resurrection, for the believer, is over already finds definite expression in v. 25: "The hour cometh, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live." We recall the words of St. Paul: "If ye then be risen with Christ. . . ."

Thus far we have emphasised what is undoubtedly the prevailing note of the Fourth Gospel. It amounts to a transmutation of primitive ideas. But now there comes into view a different strain



of teaching which proves how serious an overstatement it is to speak as if eschatology were wholly discarded. Thus in xxi. 22 the Parousia is conceived as an event still in the future, so near, indeed, that an apostle might live to see it: "If I will," says the risen Lord, "that he tarry till I come." Even in the Supper discourses we meet with the same conception: "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself" (xiv. 3). This is also the attitude of the First Epistle of John, the connexion of which with the Gospel is so intimate; as in the verse, "Abide in Him, that we may not be ashamed before Him at His coming" (ii. 28; cf. iii. 2). Here, too, the activity of many false prophets is interpreted as a sign of the approaching End (ii. 18). To return to the Gospel, judgment is pictured as future in a verse so extremely eschatological in colour that some scholars have rejected it as an interpolation: "The hour cometh, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth: they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done ill, unto the resurrection of judgment" (v. 28 f.). This passage also retains the idea of a universal resurrection, "at the last day," to use the repeated phrase of chapter vi. To mention one more detail, careful examination proves that "eternal life" and glory," in the Fourth Gospel, are in one aspect thoroughly eschatological.

It has been maintained that this vein of eschatological thought is not so much a conscious accommodation or concession to tradition on the evangelist's part as evidence of his failure to rid himself entirely of less spiritual elements in popular faith. On the other hand, it is much more likely that the writer meant his eschatology very seriously indeed. As Wernle puts it, the evangelist

“is one of those great men who can walk on earth with a firm tread, because they are sure of heaven.” However close his present fellowship with the unseen Lord, death was still a fact; so was the wickedness of the world, in which believers must stay awhile (xvii. 15), facing its sin and tribulation (xvi. 33); much, therefore, remained for God to do if the opposition of perfect and imperfect were to be overcome for ever. While, therefore, certain inherited ideas were discarded, *e.g.* the older anticipation of a glorified earth, and while nothing is said regarding the final destiny of Israel, yet the disappearance of apocalyptic categories by no means implies that St. John has parted with any vital element of the Christian hope. What he does rather is to simplify hope by exhibiting the depth of its roots in redeeming faith, and to remove its feverish unrest. Christ is not merely expected, He is known; He is not merely the Coming One, He is present; death is not merely to be destroyed, its destruction has taken place; life is not merely to emerge one day, it is our portion now. It is really Gnostic, not Christian, to put hope aside. Communion with the Lord, just because of its spiritual intensity, has the promise in itself of the full salvation reserved for heaven. “In my Father’s house are many mansions; I go to prepare a place for you.”

Thus St. John repeats that two-sided view of salvation, as both present and future, in being now and yet to be made perfect, with which we have become familiar in the teaching of Jesus and St. Paul. But the accent has changed. Eschatology has ceased to be the point from which faith starts: it is no longer the staple of believing conviction; rather it has become the perfect and consummated unfolding of a present redemption. By thus transmuting earlier ideas, the evangelist brought much needed help to his generation. Minds

saddened or perturbed by the delay of the Parousia were enabled to recall how great a gift had been bestowed in Christ, the Son of God, and to rest in the assurance that fellowship with the Redeemer was implicitly triumph over death. The last enemy itself, robbed of its sting, could not separate them from the love of God; it led them where they saw His face, and shared His eternal glory.

## CHAPTER V

### ESCHATOLOGY IN THE CHURCH

IN the sub-apostolic age, the doctrine of the Last Things continued to wear a strongly Judaistic hue. Men still found in Jewish apocalypses the most telling proofs of the truth of Christianity. Quotations from apocalyptic books, enforcing particular views of the future, occur not merely in the New Testament Epistle of Jude, but in the Shepherd of Hermas and the Epistle of Barnabas, dating from the first half of the second century. Into these older utterances the Christians read their own new universalistic hopes. In the form in which we possess the Ascension of Isaiah, for example, the hand of the Christian reviser can be detected. The majority of such apocalypses contain pictures of catastrophes which shall herald the end of the world, and in the Apocalypse of Peter, a fragment of which came to light recently, there is given a delineation of celestial bliss and penal woe. But a new temper has been imparted to writings originally Jewish by the inbreathing, in some measure, of the mind of Jesus. Even myths and dreams of a comparatively unspiritual character were utilised to set forth to the imagination the unspeakable gift He had mediated to mankind.

The Gentile Christianity represented by the group of writers known as the Apostolic Fathers, dating roughly from the first half of the second century, is inspired by keen anticipation of an

impending Parousia. In the closing chapter of the Teaching of the Apostles, an important Church manual of very primitive Christianity, the coming of the World-Deceiver is foretold, into whose hands the earth shall be delivered, and many shall fall away, until after premonitory signs the Lord appears with His saints on the clouds of heaven. The Kingdom of God is wholly future, and its advent is often painted in extremely sensuous colours. Next to final judgment, what stands out most is belief in the resurrection of the flesh (cf. the so-called "Apostles' Creed") and the hope of life or incorruption. Barnabas, like the Didache, has much to say regarding the period of trial and offences yet to come, but promises that the six millenniums of the world are swiftly to be followed by the opening of the seventh, the great sabbath, while the eighth will inaugurate a new dispensation of all things. The Visions of Hermas are designed to prepare men for the End and inculcate penitence as the true weapon with which to meet the persecutions of Antichrist. The date of the Parousia is, as the writer admits, unknown; let the righteous therefore wait for the reward of their deeds.

The Greek apologists, notably Justin Martyr and Aristides (who wrote respectively about 150 and 140), might have been expected to teach a reduced or philosophic version of immortality, but in fact they maintained unflinchingly the resurrection of the flesh. Justin even asserts the doctrine of Christ's reign for a thousand years in Jerusalem, though he is aware of its rejection by orthodox teachers (Dial. 80). In general the apologists clung to the primitive eschatology, though certain elements of it, *e. g.* the belief in everlasting rewards and punishments, they tended to derive more from the insight of reason than the assurance of faith. The Christian even on earth

has been made incorruptible by knowledge and virtue; should he prove faithful, he will after death become partaker of the divine nature.

But the primitive eschatology was definitely abandoned by the Gnostics, who represent a great syncretistic movement of the second and third centuries. In harmony with their general methods of allegory and speculation they wholly repudiated the doctrine of Christ's Return and of the resurrection of the flesh; combining with this the view that nothing more is to be anticipated in the future than the liberation of the spirit from the sensuous vesture of body, while the enlightened spirit, sure of God, already possesses the attribute of imperishability and only awaits entrance into the Pleroma. This corresponded to their Christology. As they held a docetic view of Jesus' earthly life, dissolving it largely in semblance, their thought of redemption embraced little more than liberation from the evil inherent in matter. Marcion (died 165), who stands considerably nearer the Christian faith than do the Gnostics with whom he has not unnaturally been confused, and who displays no speculative interests whatever, also rejected the idea of Christ's Return, and taught that only the souls of the redeemed will enter the divine kingdom; Antichrist, or the Messiah of the Demiurge or lower God, having first been overthrown.

In the last quarter of the second and the first quarter of the third century, there emerge three names of importance: Irenæus, Tertullian and Hippolytus; though we can allude here only to their more peculiar tenets in eschatology. As Harnack points out,<sup>1</sup> these Fathers of the Old Catholic Church promulgated a view of the Last

<sup>1</sup> *Grundriss der Dogmengeschichte* (2te Aufl.), 105 f.

Things in striking contrast to their rational theology and their mysticism. In opposition to Gnostic spiritualism, they laid much stress on the sensuous reality of heaven and hell, even holding the Pharisaic identity of the resurrection body with the earthly one. An obvious gulf lies between their alternating views of Christ as, on the one hand, the warlike King who returns to vanquish Antichrist and execute judgment and, on the other, the eternal Logos, divine Teacher or God-man. As a whole, their eschatology exhibits the same identity of outline with variety of detail as obtained in primitive days. Much is due to the influence of the Apocalypse of John; there are references to the six thousand years, Antichrist, his reign in Jerusalem, the campaign of the returning Lord, His victory, resurrection of believers, the realm of material joys, general resurrection, judgment, and the final end. Hippolytus is clear that the disciple of the Logos will partake of the divine nature in body no less than soul. And he stood for the hope of the Millennium. But he also combats overhasty anticipations of the End and relegates it to the far distance. In Tertullian for the first time we encounter the belief that the martyrs go straight to Paradise. Heaven is not open till the end of the world; till then, all men, including Christians, are in Hades in comfort or torture.

By far the most important name in patristic eschatology is that of Origen. In his view, the Last Things represent the final stage in that re-ascent whereby is retrieved the pre-temporal fall which led to the pre-existent soul being placed in a body inhabited by an animal soul. The first Universalist, he definitely breaks with tradition. As in other doctrines, he attempts to save the letter of Scripture while evaporating its sense by free philosophic interpretation; thus



he will not deny the Return of Christ, judgment or resurrection, but their significance is purely spiritual, and it need hardly be said that he admits no resurrection of the body. True, Christ's body rose, but He had really ceased to be man, His body vanishing in the Logos. But our body is filled and tyrannised over by desires; it forms the dungeon of the spirit; it can have no part in the consummation. Hence the good, who enter Paradise immediately, live and learn and teach there in a new spiritual body—a body of the finest radiant matter, answering to their character. Souls hitherto unpurified, however, pass into a fire which purges, not destroys them, for it is temporary and non-material fire, consisting really in the pains of conscience. Origen is thus the father of the idea of purgatory. Finally, all spirits good and bad, and even devils themselves, will be brought back to God. As he puts it: "This result must be understood as being effected, not suddenly, but slowly and gradually, seeing that the process of amendment and correction will take place imperceptibly in the individual cases throughout countless and unmeasured ages, some outstripping others and tending by a swifter course towards perfection. . . . All rational souls shall have been restored to a condition of this kind,"<sup>1</sup> This will be the "restitution of all things" spoken of in Acts iii. 21. When God is thus all in all, and sinfulness consumed, even matter will disappear. But Origen repeatedly cautions his readers against supposing that this is necessarily the concluding phase of the universe. "The consummation of all things," he writes, "is the destruction of evil, although as to the question whether it shall be so destroyed that it can never arise anywhere again, it is beyond our

<sup>1</sup> *de princ.*, III. 6. 6.

present purpose to say.”<sup>1</sup> Origen’s universalism is echoed by the Cappadocian theologians of the fourth century,<sup>2</sup> and by the school of Antioch. Gregory of Nyssa is particularly emphatic, predicting a time when “there shall no longer be a sinner in the universe, and the war between good and evil shall be ended, and the nature of evil shall pass into nothingness, and the divine and unmingled goodness shall embrace all intelligent existence.” But the Church took umbrage at the new doctrine, and still more at Origen’s tolerably pessimistic suggestion that the consummation might be followed by new æons of cosmic development starting *ab initio*, as the present æon had been preceded by countless others. Methodius fulminated against these spiritualising constructions, and he and the later Epiphanius insisted on the absolute identity of the resurrection body with the sensible body of the present; which soon became the only orthodox view. Naturally it gave rise to a good many puzzling questions about the members of the future organism, such as the fate of hands, feet, etc. The ecclesiastical condemnation of universalism was perhaps evoked not so much by the theory *per se* as by its dogmatic promulgation. Even after it had been powerfully assailed by Augustine, it retained defenders both in East and West; and for positive anathematisation it had to wait till the condemnation of Origen at the fifth Ecumenical Council in 553, under the Emperor Justinian.

There can be no doubt that the conception of future judgment played a much less leading part in Eastern than in Western thought. After Origen, with his Neoplatonic evolutionism, in which human life figures as but part of being’s

<sup>1</sup> *c. Cels.*, VIII. 72.

<sup>2</sup> Basil the Great, his brother Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus.

ebb and flow, its commanding power declined. A view of salvation which tends to regard it as a quasi-physical process of deification could take little interest in an idea so radically ethical as judgment; though nothing like the same indifference is to be charged on popular religion. The general eschatological outlook of Greek theologians after the fourth century is of the most varied kind. It became heresy to teach the doctrine of apocatastasis, or universal restitution, the complete destruction of evil, infernal punishments as no more than pains of conscience, a spiritualised view of resurrection or the creation of ever new worlds—all tenets of Origen. Heavenly bliss was conceived as a state of painlessness, of perfect knowledge, of ecstatic and contemplative enjoyment of God. Different grades of blessedness were conceded by most writers, the higher being the reward of ascetic and martyr: and, as might have been expected, widely divergent opinions prevailed as to the blessed dead; some believing they dwelt in a subterranean Hades, awaiting Christ's Return, others that they passed immediately at death to be with Christ. In respect to saints and martyrs this second view was universal. In the West, however, the primitive Christian eschatology in its main outlines persisted during the fourth century, and there were numerous champions even of the idea that Nero would come again as Antichrist. The difference between East and West, as has been already said, concerned another point. In the East, as Harnack puts it, "no one can help seeing that since Origen the core of eschatology has been torn out—the *thought of Judgment*. This thought, which gives expression to the awful responsibility of each soul before a holy God, and apart from which the forgiveness of sins must be empty and meaningless, dominates the Gospel, and gave its stamp to the older

Christianity. But "scientific theology" pushed it into the background. . . . That it is appointed to men to die, and after that the judgment, is a truth on which dogmatic theology kept silence, however much attention popular faith might give it. Hence the close connexion with morality was lost, and hence, too, in some quarters even Islam brought deliverance. It was otherwise in the West. . . . If we compare the medieval West and the medieval East—the theologians, that is, not the laity—the impression is irresistible that the West had kept that fear of the Judge which the East tended to let slip. It was the unquiet element in the life of faith of Western Christians; it sustained the thought of forgiveness; and for that reason it helped to make possible the Reformation of Western Catholicism"<sup>1</sup> We may add that it helped to teach men the practical meaning of Christianity for daily life.

Augustine is of special importance for Church views as to the Intermediate State and purgatory. Like other patristic writers he conceives the Intermediate State as a receptacle of both good and evil: even Paradise is situated not in heaven but in the underworld. It is credible, he holds, that Christ on His descent thither rescued sinners from Hades, but the view that He saved all the dead in the underworld is to be rejected. Purgatory is first distinctly taught by Augustine in his treatise *de doctrina christiana*, but we shall see that previous thinkers had prepared the way. Certain elements in his representation are new. Most former writers had regarded purgatory as existing right up to the Last Judgment, so that until after the great assize none could enter either heaven or hell; but in Augustine's view believing souls are not detained till the last day, but advance

<sup>1</sup> *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* (4te Aufl.), II. 67.

to celestial bliss after a brief process of purification. For them it is only a preliminary stage of transition—a purging fire, he calls it, designed to cleanse faithful spirits, out of which some rise more quickly, some more slowly, in accordance with their attitude to things of sense. But for the hardened and unbelieving, purgatory becomes a place of eternal pain. Furthermore, taking a line fated to have immense historical results, Augustine goes on to teach that prayers and masses offered by survivors for believing souls still detained in the cleansing fires may win for them a mitigation or curtailment of their purgatorial experience. It is vain, however, to offer sacrifice or prayer for the wicked. At most their torment may be rendered rather more endurable. He maintains emphatically the eternity of punishment. This was erected into a Church dogma in 553, it being declared that “if any one says or thinks that the punishment of devils or godless men is only temporary and will some time terminate, or that devils and godless men will be restored, let him be anathema.”

It is necessary to examine the history of the idea of purgatory with more care, because in no other respect does the orthodox Protestant eschatology differ from the Catholic. Plato had spoken of purifying penances of souls in the world beyond the grave, and it is significant that the Christian Platonists of Alexandria, Clement and Origen, are the earliest advocates of the notion in Church theology. To them, however, the fire is not material, but inward and secret, “kindled by the sinner himself within his own heart.” “Even if it be a Paul or a Peter,” Origen writes, “he shall come into that fire, but such are they of whom it is written, ‘Though thou pass through the fire, the flame shall not scorch thee.’” Ideas of this sort were in the air, and there are contemporary

Western parallels. Thus Tertullian says: "No one will hesitate to believe that in Hades the soul undergoes some compensatory discipline, without prejudice to the full process of the resurrection, when the recompense will be administered through the flesh as well."<sup>1</sup> From the time of Gregory the Great (590-604), by whom the doctrine is set forth in much detail, purgatory became a part of orthodoxy. Imperceptibly the idea of fire grew more realistic, and a connexion was set up between the general conception of the *ignis purgatorius* and the ecclesiastical system of indulgences, the Church's prestige being naturally heightened by acceptance of the view that her administration of grace actually reaches into the next life. Official pronouncements on the topic were first made at the Council of Florence in 1439, when union between the Latin and Greek Churches was debated. Both communions held then, as they still hold, that purgatory as a place of suffering certainly exists. The Greeks, however, leave the form of suffering indeterminate, and are satisfied with the words "through tribulation."

The Roman doctrine of purgatory, as developed authoritatively on various occasions, may be briefly stated thus. The souls of those who die in a state of grace, yet without having been purified from venial sins, or undergone the proper temporal punishment of mortal sins the guilt of which has been remitted, are detained in purgatory, of whose existence we are certified by Holy Writ. Their souls are certain to reach eternal happiness but can no longer acquire merit; they suffer punishment; but they can be aided by the vows, prayers, satisfactions and almsgivings of the living, by indulgences, but especially by the sacrifice of the Mass. When purified, they pass into heaven.

<sup>1</sup> *de anima*, 58.



The Council of Trent uses noticeably general phrases, adding a caution against unprofitable curiosity about "the more difficult and subtle questions, which tend not to edification." Bishops are enjoined to prohibit as scandals "those things which tend to a certain kind of curiosity or superstition, or which savour of filthy lucre."<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, many points on which no dogma exists are still matter of controversy between Roman divines. Thus it is disputed whether the aim of purgatory is wholly punitive or wholly purifying, or both at once. It is disputed whether the fire is real or figurative, bodily or spiritual. Discussions have also taken place regarding the locality of purgatory, the number of its inmates, their conscious certainty of final salvation, and the mode of efficacy to be attributed to the masses offered on their behalf. The dogma as a whole is traced to the New Testament. Passages adduced in proof are Matt. v. 22; xii. 32; Phil. ii. 10 f.; 1 Pet. iii. 18 ff.; but especially 1 Cor. iii. 11-15, where St. Paul declares that "the Day breaks in fire, and the fire will test the work of each, no matter what that work may be."<sup>2</sup> Reference is also uniformly made to one of the Old Testament Apocrypha, 2 Macc. xii. 42-46, where Judas Maccabæus is said to have sent money to Jerusalem, to be offered as a sacrifice for the sins of the dead. The apocryphal passage yields something to the Roman argument, but what St. Paul plainly has in mind is a fire that tests, not purges, a fire that burns at the last judgment, not after each man's death.

Opposition to the dogma of purgatory was raised even in the Middle Ages by such evangelical spirits as Wycliffe and Hus, who protested energetically against the priestly exploitation of the doctrine. In the sixteenth century the

<sup>1</sup> Sess. XXV.

<sup>2</sup> Moffatt's translation.



Reformers cast out the whole body of purgatorial teaching as insufficiently based on Scripture and as utterly incongruous with the evangelical view of sin and salvation. Luther attacked indulgences for the dead in his famous theses. The sixty-seven articles of Zwingli state with telling brevity that "Holy Scripture knows nothing of a purgatory after this life"; in the Smalcald Articles Luther repudiates purgatory and everything bound up with it as *mera diaboli larva*; the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England proclaim that "the Romish doctrine concerning Purgatory . . . is a fond thing, vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture"; the Westminster Confession, after declaring that the souls of the dead immediately return to God who gave them, the righteous being received into the highest heavens, and the wicked cast into hell, proceeds: "Besides these two places for souls separated from their bodies, the scripture acknowledgeth none." It has been felt throughout the Protestant world that any view of future purgation such as Rome has promulgated rests upon a definitely legalistic view of the Gospel, renders salvation insecure on principle, and undermines the sense of peace with God. On such terms, death cannot be said to have no terrors for the believer. As it has been put recently: "It is the boast of Rome that it alone gives intellectual assurance to minds perplexed by modern doubts and questionings; but in regard to the no less important question of religious assurance—the question as to whether it is well with a man here or hereafter—it is itself responsible for an addition of oppressive doubts and fears."<sup>1</sup> It may, of course, be contended that what the Reformers were concerned to reject specifically is the *Roman*

<sup>1</sup> W. P. Paterson, *The Rule of Faith*, 257.

doctrine of purgatory, but not *all* doctrine on the subject. This is the position of Dr. Hort as regards the English Articles, and while declining Roman theories about the future state as baseless he continues persuasively: "The idea of purgation, of cleansing as by fire, seems to me inseparable from what the Bible teaches us of the divine chastisements; and, though little is directly said respecting the future state, it seems to me incredible that the divine chastisements should in this respect change their character when this visible life is ended. . . . I do not believe that God's purposes of love can ever cease towards us in any stage of our existence, or that they can accomplish themselves by our purification and perfection without painful processes."<sup>1</sup> Our conclusions regarding this topic will naturally follow from what we may determine as to the related question of sinlessness at death.

Mention should also be made of the scholastic Roman doctrine of the *limbus patrum*, the place on the fringe of hell in which the just of Old Testament days, and righteous heathen, were detained until Christ by His descent to the underworld released them: and of the *limbus infantium*, where unbaptised infants are kept, as being implicated in original sin though innocent of actual transgression. Limbus is a place without joy but also without "the pain of sense."

In other respects Protestant eschatology, in its strictly orthodox forms, agrees with Catholic. In both it is taught that on the finally impenitent an irrevocable sentence is passed at death, dooming them to endless torment of body and soul, though with gradations of intensity adjusted to personal guilt. The damned suffer an agonising consciousness of the eternal good they have lost;

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, vol. ii. 336.

in addition they are tortured physically, abandoned by God, and compelled to associate with lost men and devils. No prospect remains for ever of alleviation or release. Modern writers who have felt surprise at the revolt against traditional teaching on the Last Things have in all likelihood possessed only a vague or partial knowledge of the details on which tradition has insisted. It ought further to be said that, so far from acknowledging any difficulty in combining such a dogma with the Christian thought of God, orthodox writers saw in it a supreme illustration of His glory; and even such a writer as Jonathan Edwards, taking his cue from Thomas Aquinas, could say that "the view of the misery of the damned will double the ardour of the love and gratitude of the saints in heaven."

It has been impossible in one short chapter to enumerate many of the individual opinions ventilated in the past. Nothing has been said about transmigration, pre-existence, plurality of lives,<sup>1</sup> metamorphosis; the distinction between "Paradise" and "Abraham's bosom"; the restoration of the physical body; the sleep of the soul in death. But a few words must be devoted to one form of eschatology which has had an important and varied history.

*Chiliasm* (from the Greek word *chilioi*, a thousand) is literally the doctrine of a Kingdom, lasting a thousand years, which at the end of the ages Christ is to establish on earth. Originating in Jewish hopes of a Messianic kingdom, with Jerusalem as capital—Chiliasm was really at first a

<sup>1</sup> Before embarking on the discussion of such topics, we should have to ask whether any *meaning* can be attached to "speculations which represent the same person as passing through a succession of lives in each of which he is absolutely precluded from all possible memory of the events of those which have gone before."

compromise between the heavenly hope of Apocalyptic and the earthly hope of the prophets—the idea seized upon men of an intermediate earthly reign of Jesus the Messiah, a reign preliminary to the final glory of heaven. It was to be the scene of sensible joys at their fullest. Traces of this conception, it has been held, exist in the New Testament; certainly in the Apocalypse we find the statement that Christ will rule on earth during the thousand years of Satan's captivity (xx. 1–10). Hence the name Chiliasm. Now for two centuries Chiliasm was the popular form of Christian hope. And the thought of what salvation is could not but deteriorate in consequence. It was, however, more than popular; not merely was it shared by heretics like Cerinthus and Montanus, and the passionate Tertullian, who says: "We do confess that a kingdom is promised to us upon the earth, although before heaven, only in another state of existence; inasmuch as it will be after the resurrection for a thousand years in the divinely built city of Jerusalem."<sup>1</sup> Even the orthodox Irenæus expounds in detail, and with abundance of proof, the hope of a temporal and earthly kingdom of the saints, after the resurrection, in the terrestrial Holy City.<sup>2</sup>

But various influences combined to make Chiliasm impossible as the Church's final view. Theologians began to think in more spiritual terms. Origen put forward a doctrine of the Last Things which by its preponderantly inward and ideal character tended to expel more realistic prejudices. Frequently he speaks with a certain lofty disdain of those who "understand the divine scriptures in a sort of Jewish sense," and wish that "what now is should exist again," and "are of opinion that the fulfilment of the promises of the future are to be

<sup>1</sup> *Adv. Marcion.*, III. 24.

<sup>2</sup> *Adv. Haer.* V., cc. 31 ff.

looked for in bodily pleasure and luxury.”<sup>1</sup> In the controversy that followed, between Origenism and Chiliasm, one reason why Origenism gained the victory is that Chiliasm was not protected by the Creed. Hence Apollinaris’ revival of chiliastic views in the fourth century could be interpreted as one proof more of his doctrinal unsoundness. But Chiliasm flourished long in the West. There, as has been pointed out, its prominence was chiefly owing and equivalent to a deeper sense of judgment to come. What pushed it aside finally was the progress of the Catholic Church as an earthly institution: for Augustine was able to interpret the millennium as signifying the reign of the Church during the period of its mundane history, and the judges of Rev. xx. 4 not as glorified saints but as the actual rulers of the Church of Rome.

Since his day, Chiliasm, or, as it is often designated, Millenarianism, has usually ranked as a doctrinal eccentricity. Isolated groups, such as the Anabaptists of Münster in Reformation times, or the Fifth Monarchy men of Cromwell’s day, have looked upon the earthly divine kingdom as a consummation to be secured by the use of force. Later advocates of a mild type of Millenarianism are most of the leading divines of the Westminster Assembly, Bengel the commentator, Toplady, Charles Wesley, German theologians as distinguished as Rothe and Delitzsch, English theologians like Trench, Ellicott and Alford. Pre-millennialists hold that Christ’s advent will usher in the Millennium. The common belief of modern chiliasts has been thus summarised. “They agree in holding that the millennial age will be heralded by the personal return of the Lord Jesus, to establish a theocratic kingdom of

<sup>1</sup> *de princ.*, II. 11. 2.

universal righteousness, during which time sin will remain on earth but be greatly diminished. Immediately on Christ's appearing will take place the resurrection of the righteous dead and the translation of living Christians, who will be rewarded according to their works. The judgment work of Christ will occupy the whole millennial period. The Jews, restored to their own land, will repent and be converted. All the hosts of Antichrist will be destroyed, Satan bound, and the Holy Ghost poured out. At the end of the millennial age Satan, released, will make a last vain attempt to regain his power, but he and the wicked, who now have their resurrection, will be finally judged and cast into the lake of fire. The earth will be renewed by fire, and be the scene of the everlasting kingdom of Christ over all sanctified mankind. Attempts to fix the date of the advent are generally disapproved."

Millennialism has been looked upon with favour by one or two modern writers, who see in it a strong assertion of the grand universalism of the divine purpose, whereby all that God has made will attain eternal completion. But this true thought can quite well be expressed apart from the specific notion of a preliminary reign of Christ on earth. The theory as a dogmatic construction is really grounded on one New Testament passage, Rev. xx. 1-6. Support has been sought for in Rom. xi.; but there, it scarcely need be said, there is no allusion whatever to such things as the reassembling of Israel in the Holy Land, the restoration of David's throne, the world-supremacy of the Jews, and the revival of Mosaic ceremonial in Jerusalem. Nor in 1 Cor. xv., to which frequent reference is made, does St. Paul say one word as to a period of special glory for the Church on earth. Rev. xx. 1-6, then, is the *fons et origo* of the doctrine as a whole; and the ambiguous and



shimmering figures of that book scarcely lend themselves to a consistent or impressive formulation. *Calvinus sapuit, qui nihil in Apocalypsin scripserit.* It must also be considered that chiliastic pictures of Christ's kingdom of a thousand years mingle the characteristics of historical development with those of ultimate consummation in a fashion too incongruous and equivocal to win the spontaneous assent of Christian minds. And we shall see reason later to reject the opinion that faith can rest in any conception of the perfected Kingdom which would confine it to the present order of time and space. Biblical realism is misused when it is made a plea for a consummation that shall be perceptible by the senses. But this at all events may be said, that the rise, or renascence, of millennialism is commonly a protest of living faith against the contemporary secularisation of the Church.

Other modern theories, by which more recent Protestant thought seeks to give variety to the rigour or monotony of Church teaching on the future, are occasionally discussed in some of the later chapters.



## PART II

### A RECONSTRUCTIVE STATEMENT

#### CHAPTER I

##### THE CHRISTIAN HOPE

It will probably be agreed that modern feeling makes it more than usually difficult to teach or preach with effect about what divines have been accustomed to call topics of eschatology—death, immortality and judgment. An evidence of difficulty is the marked infrequency with which the thing is done. Sermons on the joys of heaven or future retribution are now tolerably rare. Not a few preachers studiously avoid such themes, and the congregations even of some who speak out would, it is likely, confess to a good deal of confusion. Many of the best minds are painfully aware that the policy of relegating eschatology to the background or keeping all statements about the Christian prospect as pale and indeterminate as possible will not serve, and that Christian people have a right to guidance in this field as in others where it is easier to expatiate. The fact that eschatology comes into the Creed is significant and arresting; still, in their efforts to comply with its brief and solemn indications men have found themselves embarrassed by the richness of

material set forth in modern Biblical theologies and have begun to feel that even Scripture texts, merely as texts, are an inadequate criterion of the truth which it is their business to teach. As a result, we may expect that, when reaction from the present neglect sets in, as it must, people will look round for a doctrine of the future whose moral and religious value comes home directly to the religious mind—a doctrine born of faith and therefore triumphantly able to evoke it.

Ecclesiastical thought, as distinct from the New Testament, can scarcely be said to have devoted any special care to "the Last Things." As the conviction grew and spread that the visible earthly Church is the Kingdom, and its triumph the Kingdom's consummation, the centre of gravity slowly changed from future to present. Over and over again it was heretics who kept the eschatological interest alive. In their hands conceptions of the future were mainly employed to censure contemporary Church life, a method which naturally deepened the suspicion with which official theology looked upon the subject. To the official mind, it has been said, the next world was not so much the goal of Church activities as their presupposition, and nothing is more significant of the subordinate place assigned to the future life than the fashion in which, in medieval theology, the fortunes of the departed soul came to depend on the functions of the earthly priesthood, with its sacrifices and intercessions. Although the Reformation was a period of acute eschatological feeling—Luther believed the end of all things was at hand—yet the unbridled enthusiasm of the Anabaptists discouraged a more theological treatment of the topic in later Protestantism. With the awakening of critical thought in the eighteenth century, and the discovery that prophetic portions of the New Testament owe much to the symbolisms

of Jewish Apocalyptic, there arose a disposition to regard eschatology as a falsification, blameworthy or inevitable, of the original message of Jesus, or as at most a purely temporary husk round the precious kernel. Then a change came. Bengel, the devout and gracious exegete, had struck the new note earlier, but the nineteenth century had well begun ere it was echoed back on every side. Men awoke to unfulfilled and even unattempted missionary tasks, and were thus forced to reflect more deeply on the purposes of the Eternal in history; discussions on heredity revealed the complex character and conditions of personal responsibility; and a re-examination of eschatological conclusions became inevitable. Professor Orr, indeed, suggests that if the doctrine of eschatology has ever had a special epoch, in which its various issues were submitted to thorough and prolonged scrutiny, that epoch is "our own age, with its generally widened outlook on the universe, its larger conceptions of the divine love, its better knowledge of heathenism, its *fin-de-siècle* feeling—all which have combined to press on it with peculiar intensity the questions of the future destiny of the individual and the race."<sup>1</sup> His words, however, apply to the middle third of the nineteenth century, scarcely to the present day. Recent doctrinal theology has given little attention to problems of the future,<sup>2</sup> and the extraordinary prominence which eschatology has received in quite recent interpretations of the New Testament has tended, as in the eighteenth century, to invest the subject with a purely historical interest, and to postpone the question of its religious value.

Objections to the inclusion of eschatology, as a doctrine of hope, in the reasoned statement of Christian faith have been taken from more points

<sup>1</sup> *Progress of Dogma*, 280.

<sup>2</sup> It looks as though the war might alter this.

of view than one. No credible or inspiring doctrine of the future, it may be said, is necessary to faith; it cannot, indeed, be necessary, for it is impossible. How can any man be certain of future events or conditions? Providence, sin, forgiveness—these and suchlike topics rightly enter into the full statement of faith, their foothold in experience is secure. Here we can both understand and verify assertions. We can say for certain what impression of God we receive from Christ, as we can that Nature makes the impression of uniformity. But no such assurance of reality is felt when we gaze out to the next life. Let us then confine ourselves to "this grace wherein we stand," this present fellowship with God our Saviour, leaving its eventual form to His wise love. *Wenn ich nur dich habe, so frage ich nichts nach Himmel und Erde.*

This position, if not fully Christian, may be taken by a Christian mind. Other critics go further. Is it not the case, they inquire, that the average man has become wholly indifferent to the future? Does he not receive all declarations on the subject with a kind of passive resistance? Now it is undeniable that not merely materialism, but even modern idealism is largely hostile to eschatology as such; "in the thinking of civilised men," writes one observer, in familiar words, "there has been for years a steady ebb from the shores of another life."<sup>1</sup> Waiving the question whether our age is not in this respect like many another, we shall all concede that immortality has often seemed 'to lose its glory for good men absorbed in science, in social reclamation, in present imperious duties to which religion herself is summoning brave toilers. Nor is this indifference an atmosphere simply, the

<sup>1</sup> G. A. Smith, in *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament*, 209.

more penetrating in virtue of its elusiveness and intangibility; quite frequently the matter is argued in calm and measured terms. It is held, for example, that a state of pure bliss would be intolerable to an intelligent being for a week, let alone an eternity. Some, like James Payn, confess they are so tired, they long only for rest; and the safest rest is in the grave. They assent eagerly to the Hindu proverb: "It is better to die than to sleep"; with an almost passionate resignation they repeat the exquisite lines of the Roman poet—

"Soles occidere et redire possunt;  
Nobis cum semel occidit brevis lux,  
Nox est perpetua una dormienda." <sup>1</sup>

To the rejoinder that the opinion of humanity is against them, and the horror of extinction all but universal, they answer first by calling the fact in question, then by arguing that what men fear is not death, but dying. Death, moreover, cannot touch us, for "where we are death is not, and where death is, we are no longer." <sup>2</sup> Again, doctors have testified that in many years they have never known any one afraid to die; and could men die so peacefully, it is asked, or could they in rapidly increasing numbers resort to suicide, if belief in a conscious future were still vigorous and beneficent or had anything further to contribute to the moral resources of mankind?

Let Christian teachers, then, it is said, recognise

<sup>1</sup> It is worth while to quote Mr. Arthur Symonds' rendering—

"Suns may set and suns upon earth arise;  
As for us, when for us the brief light dies,  
There is only night, and an everlasting sleeping."

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Haering, *Der christliche Glaube*, 547. The phrase is really Epicurean.

in all this a characteristic attitude of the nobler spirits in our time. Let them frankly acknowledge that many people, not inferior in excellence or virtue to their Christian neighbours, are bravely choosing to avert their eyes from the dream of another life, confessing with Romanes that the precept to "work while it is day" has gained an intensified force from the terribly intensified meaning of the words that "the night cometh when no man can work," and consecrating on this account a purer zeal to unselfish toil for a better order upon earth.

What answer can we make? This first of all, that Christian hope is essentially but one aspect of Christian faith; no more, but certainly nothing less. It is not an inference from faith, an inference obtained by unimpeachably valid logic; it is not a natural or independent intuition; it is part of faith itself. It is the same mind which says, "Thou, O Lord, art my portion," and, "I am continually with Thee: Thou wilt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory." Our relation to God in Christ, that is to say, has a future as really as a past, a future which is no mere casual or problematic appendix to the present, but its living prolongation. Apart from this, the so-called Christianity which remains will issue in a pessimism not less dark than the belief in Fate, or *εἰμαρμένη*, which crushed the mind of Greece and Rome, from which the Gospel promised emancipation, and against which were directed some of the most spiritual intuitions of the mystery-religions. A purely immanent and mundane Christianity may be constructed at any time by the manipulation of ideas; what is certain is that it can never be believed. It is the living paradox of faith that the more we are conscious of receiving from God now and here, the more passionately we crave its continuance and the

more ineradicable becomes the conviction that this desire will not be put to shame. The pain of loss is real only for those who have possessed.<sup>1</sup> Christian hope is set not upon a mere multiplicity of things—some of which must be relative and uncertain—but upon Him Who is Last because He is the First.

We encounter here one of the few vital questions in this province, which it will be convenient to deal with at greater length. Eschatology has suffered in the general mind because the beliefs it treats of are regarded as somehow optional and arbitrary, not merely in detail but as a whole; and there will always, no doubt, be those who echo the youthful Schleiermacher's famous contention that to surrender immortality may be noblest of all. But when, putting away abstractions, we betake ourselves to history—which is wiser than us all—it is to discover that, however religion ought to be defined, hope and trust are of its very essence. The concluding sentence in so many a story of childhood, "They all lived happily ever afterwards," is in reality a religious postulate. It is a very primitive form of the ultimate value-judgment which attributes to personality a worth

<sup>1</sup> There is a striking passage in Jean Paul Richter where this point is made by suggestion, yet with great dramatic force. In a dream the narrator sees her mother lying on her deathbed, expecting the end of all with inexpressible grief, not because she is about to meet a God she fears but because she must soon part for ever with a God she loves. "One friendship perfect and divine" had been her happiness, and in a few hours it would terminate. After farewells spoken to dear friends, "Now," are her words, "now comes that which is the bitterest—I must take farewell of the most Beloved of all, of Thee, my God." Clearly the writer's intention is to teach by paradox that there is one idea the religious mind simply cannot form—that of eventually parting with the Father who has called us friends (Richter, *Selina*, V.; the reference I owe to the kindness of my friend, the Rev. John Baillie, M.A.).



beyond time and greater than the whole world. Look where we may, prophetic religions and religions of redemption seem always to have taken this line; they have pointed forward to a blessed consummation of human life, even when they differed widely as to the meaning of blessedness. Eschatology, in short, is not devout poetry, covering up hideous doubts and fears, like moss upon the torn and ragged stone; it represents a vital and inalienable impulse of the religious spirit. For, by its very nature, religion takes account of the last and final things. It is concerned with ultimate realities, which have projected themselves into our experience in the form of unconditioned values—values which flatly decline to be made relative by the levelling operations of the understanding in science or the scientific research of history. Neither science with its ultimate categories—ions, atoms, cosmic laws—nor history with its highest terms—classic periods, movements of civilisation and the like—can give or even conceive what is wanted. Complete and lasting satisfaction is vainly sought in the social experience or in any remodelled social system we can picture. But religion is religion only as it rises into the sphere of finalities, to unite us with the Eternal in modes over which change has no power. Elsewhere we have no choice but to accept the relative; faith alone has, and, better still, has promise of, the absolute.<sup>1</sup>

Considerations of this sort, however, gain a profounder impressiveness as we see them give concrete shape to the religion of the New Testament. In Dogmatic as now taught eschatology comes last, constituting, so to speak, the final movement of the symphony; it is usually the briefest section of the whole and may quite likely

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Troeltsch's article, "Eschatologie," in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*.

stand for something still briefer in the private creed. But in the New Testament it is the atmosphere in which men live and move. Scholarship, we all know, has discovered this in the last twenty years. Book has followed book, proving more and more in detail how the convictions, the incentives and the consolations of the first Christian believers were—not purely eschatological but—eschatological through and through. Technical study has recently brought this out; but before it became a commonplace of theology, the secret had been found by keen and passionate religion. In a letter of the early 'eighties Francis Crossley, the heroic philanthropist of Manchester, writes: "The coming of the Messiah was the refrain of every Jewish prophet's song, and not the less the central image in every glowing picture of the future the apostles of Christ have painted." He adds (and for this principally I quote his words): "It is the very flesh of the Bible: remove it, and a skeleton is left." "It is the very flesh of the Bible"—surely an estimate of the New Testament hope as true as it is striking. Thought upon the great realities—the Kingdom, the Person of Jesus, the Spirit—is tinged with eschatology in every fibre and at times all but defined in eschatological terms. Hence it is little more than a stimulating hyperbole to say that delineation of the last things was the dogma of primitive belief. To be a Christian is "to wait for God's Son from heaven, even Jesus, who delivereth us from the wrath to come" (1 Thess. i. 10).

Reserving, then, the question how far New Testament eschatology, in framework or minute detail, is or can be ours, we may call the apostolic mind to witness that Christian hope is no otiose addendum to faith; it is fibre of the living strand. Life in Christ, felt and known within, tends to a goal by its vital movement. Victory over sin,

over sorrow and over impotence—such a victory as can never be forfeited—is part of the Gospel promise, whereas salvation ending in death is only a phrase. The soul cannot do justice to the glad tidings, or to the fellowship with God inaugurated by forgiveness—cannot respond to the challenge of His redemptive action for us and in us—except as it travels forward, in desire and presentiment, to an irreversible completion. Thus faith is even more than the inspiration of hope; it is its regulator, its law. We have no right to expect what is not contained by implication in the Father's self-bestowal in Jesus; that would be to desert faith for uncontrolled and uninspiring reverie; but also we have no right to expect anything *less* than Jesus' sacrifice and triumph bid us claim. At present, the Christian mind is in danger of anticipating too little rather than too much. Its somewhat insecure hold upon Jesus' thought of God—the greatness of that thought, its transcendence, the place it gives to omnipotence—has narrowed the range of expectation. But the great periods of Christian life—the first century *imprimis*, but also the Reformation—have been rich in eschatology. The noblest hymns, particularly those inspired by the Lord's Supper, are full of it. The soul, when left to itself, is sure of it and can only be silenced in deference to a theory. Moreover, as history proves, religious progress is signalised not by the gradual elimination of “the rapture of the forward view,” but by its ever-increasing purity and elevation. Hence it is a just and illumining thought that every system of theology should be read backwards at least once, commencing with the last things, since it is in the conclusion we find the truest index of the whole. If a man has really understood what the divine Fatherhood means, or the forgiveness of sins, or the new nature; if his faith leads him, as faith

in the New Testament always does, to take utter fulness of life as the divine gift and to build his view of redemption to the scale of Christ's infinitude—all this will come out convincingly in his exposition of the Church's hope.

Manifestly, however, this is not to be confused with the position, often loosely identified with it, that the traditional scheme of eschatology is correct as it stands. The fullest exposition is here emphatically not the best. Detail, in eschatology, may be the signal for an inrush of sheer negation. The pendulum has a way of swinging sharply from confident omniscience to quavering doubt, and if in one age there has been much wild talk as to the precise date of Christ's return, or the composition of the spiritual body, or the distance from earth at which the living are to meet the Lord in the air, in the next a tendency will prevail to ask whether *anything* can be known. It will not do to insist on men's theological soundness as regards the "lake of fire" or the "second resurrection."

In any case, it is mistaken to speak of "the traditional scheme," as if there were only one. Eschatologies have been fairly numerous; most of them approved or tolerated for a time, all moulded by contemporary modes of thought, all tending more or less to bind up with the Gospel certain ideas which had come to a given age with the force of a new revelation, but which we can now see to have no claim at all to fix *the* Christian interpretation of the future. Further, in painting things to come, tradition has drawn without historical discrimination on the various books of Scripture. The resurrection has been pictured in colours copied from Ezekiel's Valley of Dry Bones; the judgment scene has owed something to the visions of Amos; the cartoons of St. Paul, St. Peter and the Apocalypse have been blended

freely, as though it were known for certain that all three writers thought alike, even in minute detail. Commentators have now and then been dull; and, after all, portions of the Bible are sealed to him who has no poetry in his soul. Briefly, we may say of tradition in this province that it has offended in four main ways: by a specious amplitude of information; by insistence on points in which faith has no vital stake; by occasional self-contradictions where one side of the alleged antinomy possesses little or no religious value; and by an uncritical or statutory use of Biblical phraseology. In general, too, there has been a tendency to indulge fancy at the cost of faith. The graphic symbols of the preacher have been petrified in doctrine. In view of this, a work of revision is become necessary to detect the dead matter lodged in tradition, and to replace "categories with which the mind will not work any more" by conceptions which really help us to exhibit the hope actually cherished by believers.

We naturally turn for aid, in the first instance, to the historic method, and the light it casts on the general religious development. Religious men have invariably hoped, even in presence of death; and hope has always clothed itself in a dress of symbolism. Part of a given eschatological conception must be new, since the world moves on; more will be old, perhaps very old indeed, for eschatology according to the experts is the region in which custom dies hardest. "Eschatological beliefs," to quote Dr. Charles, "are universally the last of all beliefs to be influenced by the loftier conceptions of God."<sup>1</sup> Regarding any concrete scheme, therefore, we must ask two questions: What are the religious truths to which this emblematic dress was given? and, Why was

<sup>1</sup> *Immortality* (Drew Lecture), 9.

this dress chosen, and no other? A permanent nucleus of belief linked together the series of changing forms, and with this the philosophy of religion may deal, or Christian Dogmatic. Also this belief put on a changing garb of figure and symbol, and the pedigree of this symbolism is a theme for history.

We owe a debt which it is not always easy to pay cheerfully to modern investigators who are trying to bring out clearly the ethnic background and antecedents of New Testament ideas of the End. Success in their inquiry means at least this, that the Gospel did not shrink from categories and thought-forms into which the human soul had already poured its hope and passion. Why should it be felt as other than an ennobling thought that Jesus' way was paved for Him by devout minds of former days? Time was when the Church ascribed the Psalms, with hardly an exception, to a single author, thus condemning whole centuries to silence; and the thought that the psalmists were in reality a great company of singers, and that in religious history the good need not be the enemy of the best, came to many with the delight of a discovery. Similarly, it is uplifting to believe that spiritual movements in Babylonia or Persia may have prepared "earthen vessels" into which the treasure of apostolic conviction might be poured. Each case where this could be demonstrated would mean not one religious thought the less, but one centre of religion the more. If examples are needed, one may be found in certain exterior traditional elements in the New Testament picture of the last Assize, which have been traced with approximate certainty to the thought of the Farther East. Or again, it is common knowledge that Bible eschatology as a whole is set within a definite framework—the conception of two distinct worlds or æons:



the present age, ὁ αἰὼν οὗτος, or simply ὁ αἰὼν, largely subject to the powers of darkness, and the coming æon, αἰὼν μέλλων, or ὁ αἰὼν ὁ ἐρχόμενος, which by its advent abolishes all tragedy. It is upon this grand apocalyptic opposition that St. Paul builds up his main view of the last things. And its roots also lie in the far East. Christianity seized upon it to express that dualistic strain which always marks genuinely religious thought when it contemplates a world in which sin—that “atheistic fact,” in Dr. Carnegie Simpson’s phrase—has gained foothold. But, as Wobbermin says, “the paradoxical fashion in which the idea is presented, with its time-determined scheme—the future age is become present, yet has not ceased to be future—shows clearly what aim the idea is subserving, viz. the unconditional supremacy of one world to the other.”<sup>1</sup> Time and eternity, related as empirical to real being, are exhibited in pure contrast and without the least tendency to represent eternity as only time on a larger scale, in the great Pauline words: “Our light affliction, which is for the moment, worketh for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Cor. iv. 17, 18).

Our present task, however, lies not in problems of historic affiliation, but in the greater question as to the significance of old eschatological figures for the modern mind. Whatever be the issue of scholarly research, what has counted in the Christian religion, then or now, is not the old vocabulary but the new message. All rests upon the redeeming fact of Jesus—His attitude to the

<sup>1</sup> *Zum Streit um die Religionspsychologie*, 20.



Father, to Himself and to man; this unique experience in which He lived and died and rose again. It is on this that the New Testament dwells, often simply taking the inherited language for granted. In every religious crisis it is the new that holds the future, and it is Jesus' way to make all things new. As Holtzmann has expressed it in a well-known passage, His effect on contemporary thought may be compared to the plunge of a great rock in the waters of a quiet pool. When the upheaval has passed, the surface is covered with new wave-movements.

Troeltsch, reviewing the past, rightly concludes that eschatology, with its implied metaphysic, has always run in one of two moulds, between which even now we are forced to choose. On the one hand is the pantheistic type; and here all existence is apt to be an immanent self-adjusting unity, and the time-series of events is without significance; there is no such thing as progress, and the end of the cosmos is as completely realised now as it will ever be. Opposed to this is a type shaped and inspired by personal idealism: the fact of personality is accepted as paramount and absolute, and thought moves in a sphere controlled by ideas of freedom, purpose, creative force. God is here Supreme Will—Will that propels the world on into the future by a series of sovereign acts. Union with God, too, is no mere fact of nature, as it is for pantheism in its varied forms; it is self-surrender to an infinite object. There is a real development and a real end, and the end comes out of the development by way of history. The two views, indeed, are as unlike as æsthetic mysticism and ethical faith in God the Father. Both promise redemption, but in the first case, as Troeltsch puts it in a fairly accurate set of antitheses, "It is redemption from the partial to the whole, from the mutable to the abiding, from

the unreal to the real; in the second it is redemption from bondage to liberty, from imperfection to the perfect, from rudiments to completion, from conflict to triumph." As has been said, we must choose between them; and it is well worth observing that what really occurs is a *choice*, a moral act motivated by ethical and religious conviction, not the syllogistic result of universally acknowledged premises. Nothing can dispense a man from this ordeal. We have to give either view, in Browning's phrase, our "vote to be true." Not that it is difficult to make points as against pantheism even intellectually. Its famed solution of the haunting problem of the One and the Many is, after all, no solution, but only the movement of a wet sponge over facts that refuse to be absorbed. Further, it concedes no value to the master-principle of love, in which, rather than in intellect, our whole experience is gathered up and brought to clarity. But the final choice of pantheism or personality lies with us, as an act of intense ethical decision. Sooner or later we have to say in which alternative we find the more prevailing religious power and the deeper ethical satisfaction. Apart from a well-known type of mysticism, which accounts it gross that religion should rest on historical mediation and protests in the name of spirituality that everything must be embraced within the present unity of "God and the soul, the soul and its God," it has never been doubtful on which side the Christian eschatology must be placed. Hope, for the men who have made Christian history, is not a *pis aller*, an unconscious acknowledgment that their actual hold on God is weak, imperfect and relative; it is a sure and blessed element in a faith which clasps Omnipotent Love, and is persuaded by the Spirit's inward witness that the confusion and immaturity of earthly experience, terminating in death, is not

the end. This, and this only, is its proper essence, for God our Saviour is no ineffable Absolute, the undistinguishing and indistinguishable Whole, in which finally all souls are lost, but the God and Father of Jesus Christ our Lord.

## CHAPTER II

### OBJECTIONS ON THE THRESHOLD

EXCEPTION has been taken to the pursuit of eschatology on various grounds. It is opposed in the name of spiritual religion, of science, of ethics, and finally on behalf of a particular view of knowledge. We shall consider each of these in turn, starting with the religious veto, since if the thought of future destiny is actually irrelevant to faith in the living God, there is no need to go on.

The religious case against eschatology is best put in an early work of Schleiermacher. Addressing "the cultured despisers of religion" in 1799, he writes: "You still believe in a personal God and in personal immortality. I see: unlike myself, you are still pupils of the *Aufklärung*. Even of these conceptions I have no need in order to unveil before you the sublime beauty and divinity of religion. My God is the Universe, the Unity of the All. . . . Besides, your personal immortality outside time and behind time is in truth no immortality at all. Only he who surrenders personality, which is perishable, to God, the Eternal, has true or genuine immortality. In the midst of finitude to be one with the Infinite and in every moment to be eternal—this is the immortality of religion. Therefore strive even here to annihilate your personality, and to live

in the One and All; strive to be more than yourself, so that when you lose yourself you may lose but little." In notes to a later edition of the *Reden*, Schleiermacher pleads that in this passage he was merely discarding a sensuous and egoistic form of belief in survival. When writing, as he explained, he was thinking of the fact that Old Testament saints had no such belief and that religious feeling is concerned more with the present than the future. Hence he thought himself justified in pointing out that the hope of immortality was not so essential to piety that the two stand or fall together.

The argument, on the whole, is that interest in the world to come is a symptom of unspirituality. We are sure of God now and here, and nothing else really counts. There is a dawning sense of this in the Fourth Gospel, the writer of which over and over again repeats the truth that the believer has eternal life now.

In point of fact, the Fourth Gospel dwells on the future life more than any of the Synoptics. But apart from this, the religious mood typically expressed by Schleiermacher is very imperfectly moralised. It operates with a comparatively unethetical thought of God. Eschatology is, of course, mere foolishness if God and the Universe are two names for one thing. There is no more reason why the impersonal system of things should preserve or redeem souls than why in opening spring it should raise the leaves from the winter mould, and give them another season of green beauty. A partially moral God is always precarious; caprice may leave men in the dust. The conception of men, too, is unethetical. From the purely artistic or lyric point of view, man is a piece of nature; and to the artist one of the chief values of man is just that his greatness and

apparent promise should form so moving a contrast to his inexorable fate. That he, with "such splendid purpose in his eyes," with his love and suffering and hope, should be "blown about the desert dust, or sealed within the iron hills," has always been a fruitful and impressively pathetic theme. But art and religion appeal to disparate interests. If the Gospel is false, the æsthetic view of human life may be true, and the Christian hope has nothing in it. But if Christ is trustworthy, the only question worth asking is how far into the future His influence stretches. Can we suppose a limit to its power?

Not only so; but were the hope of blessedness to be extinguished, present experience would be robbed of its specific quality. The Christian attitude to doubt, to sense, to sin—whether in self or in society—would be radically altered. Suffering would lose its old relative aspect and become wholly dark if there were no prospect of a life unsorrowing, but only the assurance that pain and we shall disappear together. Fellowship with God, known to be merely for a term of years, is not the fellowship which Jesus gives. It is simple lack of imagination which denies this—failure to see that the future, when it arrives, will be quite as real as the actual present.

Thus the endless hope is no vestigial survival of spiritual immaturity. It is the result of seeing God in the grace of Jesus. There was a promise in the human heart which God fulfilled by giving Christ; there is now a promise in the Christian heart which He will fulfil by bringing in complete redemption—a promise not merely that Christ will continue to save men in this world, but that at last He will make an end of all tragedy. A page back I quoted words from Schleiermacher's earlier period. There is a later glimpse of the

great thinker, in his sixty-third year, at the graveside of his only son. "I stand here," he then said, "with my comfort and hope set only on the strong petition of our Lord: 'Father, I will that they whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am.'"

The Gospel, without the life everlasting, has lost its identity; and a man need only be a Christian long enough to know that this is a position beyond dispute. As it has been put, "The end is not always present to the religious consciousness; it lies sometimes below the horizon; but it is always there." Even the eighteenth-century Rationalism, which swept out most doctrines, kept a firm hold upon immortality, because in its own dim, unimpassioned way it clung fast to God.

Again, it has been objected that Christian eschatology must of necessity be in conflict with science. It means (does it not?) that the present world-process will come abruptly to a close, whereas the scientific mind can only conceive the series of changes in space and time—with which human life is inextricably entangled—as without beginning or end; just as each effect must have a cause, and so backwards for ever, so each cause must have an effect, and so onwards interminably.<sup>1</sup>

It is not desirable to evade this by protesting simply that faith makes no assertions about the physical cosmos. That is not the fact. Faith asserts, for instance, that body is organic and ministrant to spirit; that evolution was so guided of God as finally to issue in souls capable of divine sonship; that the phenomenon of death has no power to touch the higher self. These are all affirmations regarding the material system, its

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Kölbinger, *Die bleibende Bedeutung der urchristlichen Eschatologie*, 30.



powers and its limitations; and it is faith that makes them, not science.

But it may be pointed out that the prediction of an unending human history is at variance even with the hypothesis suggested by astronomy, according to which our planet will one day be uninhabitable. Mankind will be blotted off the face of the universe. But if faith declares—validly, we Christians hold—that fellowship with God cannot be broken by the death of the individual, it is equally within its rights in urging that the reality of the future Kingdom is not affected by the coming annihilation of the race. The physical extinction of the species, if it happens, will make no difference to the things which God has prepared for them that love Him. Nothing that science can say vetoes Christian belief in the immortality of the individual. To believe in immortality, it is unnecessary to know the later fortunes of the body, for no ascertainable fact regarding physical corruption is relevant to the higher issue. In like manner, the final history of our planet is irrelevant to the Christian hope for mankind. The new transcendent order belongs to another plane of being. God will give the new environment as it may please Him. How or when reality will be vouchsafed to the perfect Kingdom—after the disappearance of the earth or before—we have no interest in deciding, even if decision were possible, for Christian hope is set not upon a future condition of the world, but on God.

Again, eschatology is assailed on moral grounds. "Otherworldliness," it is said, has commonly induced a contemptible neglect of life in the present—its ennobling activities, its pathetic needs. To live with a future life in view is to undervalue civilised existence. "This world," said Goethe, "is more than a waiting-room for

the next life." We are called to possess the world and our own personality, to wrest her secrets from nature, to give free play to intellect and imagination, to create a society organised in wisdom and liberty. This task cannot be achieved by men whose attention and energy are distracted by thoughts of a coming world.

No one will deny that too often a selfish<sup>1</sup> and fanatical "otherworldliness" has disfigured the religious life. But any single interest may unduly absorb the mind. The man of science may be so completely engrossed in research as to neglect his family; the lover of sport may sacrifice duty to pleasure; have then sport and science no place in the good life? Such eccentricities may be put aside. The really important thing is that profoundly eschatological religion has so frequently supplied moral power and zest to great social reformers. It was Christians of this type who persuaded Great Britain to stamp out slavery. Faith of the same kind led to the amelioration of prisons and the erection of hospitals. The consciousness of being in communion with God such that even death could not sever it had much to do with the manhood, trust and courage by which these men were inspired. If the human mind works sanely, what else could we expect? Can the man devoid of hope work on as bravely or unweariedly as the man whose hope is limitless? Tholuck surely had psychology on his side when he said that only a Christian can live wholly in the present, for to him the past is pardoned and

<sup>1</sup> On the charge that the desire for a personal future life is a selfish desire, cf. Mellone, *The Immortal Hope*, 18 ff. A strong evidence of the genuinely ethical power of faith in immortality is that many people explain its survival by pointing out that its moral influence in the past was so very great.

the future safe in God. What is more, no one is so constantly reminded as the Christian, if he will but study Jesus' words, that future destiny is in very close relation to present life and character. It is not believers in Christ who are tempted to exclaim, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." Nor is it they whose moral energy is sapped by the refined and exquisite melancholy of the creed, "I came like Water, and like Wind I go."

To speak of present-day Christians as too "otherworldly" is, however, an accusation fitted to provoke a smile. Far from thinking too often about the next life, they think much too seldom. It is certain that when spiritual zeal rekindles, as assuredly it will, we shall witness the uprush of a more vivid, august and passionate interest in the world to come. All deep feeling for God opens that fount of deathless hope. It is the man who has received most through Christ who is surest that he has not yet received the best. Love, action, knowledge—the most desirable and worthy experiences of man—all are ours, in this world, only in part and insecurely, whilst also it is certain that their perfect reality is in His keeping who has bestowed the "earnest." And for the believer this means two things. On the one hand, as that world of perfect good becomes more visible to faith and more attractive, "his grasp of this world becomes, perhaps, not less kindly, but it becomes less tenacious."<sup>1</sup> And on the other, how shall he prepare himself to possess that better, richer life, coming to flood our earthly experience as the ocean fills the shrunken river mouth with its mightier flood, save as he is true and faithful here? For the content of Christian

<sup>1</sup> Rainy, *Philippians*, 254.

hope is morally qualified and is assimilated only in moral ways.

One point is perhaps worth adding. It is part of faith in God to believe that men will never forego the hope of immortality. Undoubtedly no proof can be given that the Church might not drop "the life everlasting" out of the creed. But faith is sure she will not, and the certainty reposes upon the unconditionally ethical character which belongs both to God and man as revealed in Jesus. Every renaissance of spiritual religion, with its quickened sense of Christ and the import of his career, will evoke a fresh conviction that the life united to God cannot perish.

Lastly, the point has been made that eschatological conceptions are symbolic in character, and that, in this character, they are incapable of conveying truth. The fact of symbolism is, of course, self-evident. Haering, indeed, has argued that conceptions of the world to come are and must be symbolic, so to speak, to the second power. Symbolism here rises, he says, to a higher point than elsewhere in religious knowledge, "for the simple reason that in eschatology we speak of communion with God under other conditions of existence than those of the present, and have no words in which to describe it but those which are taken from present conditions."<sup>1</sup> All words expressive of the higher experience betray a sensuous origin; they reflect the life of earth. They even convey imperfectly the ideas and feelings we now have; how then can they truly set forth a future spiritual experience that will itself have changed? And is not this destructive of their validity?

The answer to this will in the main be found

<sup>1</sup> *The Christian Faith* (E.T.), 855.

in the consideration that if symbolism in thinking excludes truth, then human knowledge as such is radically unsound. Sabatier, in a captivating but defective treatment of the subject,<sup>1</sup> has sought to distinguish science and religion in this respect, arguing that while religion is doomed to express the transcendent in phenomenal images whose scope is strictly limited by space and time, the exact sciences operate with conceptions which may be taken as precise equivalents of their objects. Religion, therefore, speaks in parables; science employs notions that copy facts. This is not the place for a protracted epistemological discussion, but it may be mentioned that prominent men of science, like Mach, now maintain that the fundamental ideas of physics, such as atom, molecule, energy, mass and ether are symbolic through and through; they are really labour-saving devices, which possess a high degree of mental utility, but need have no positively true relation to the objective facts of nature. If this be so, it is conceivable that the proportion of symbolism in a statement like "God is our Father" may be much lower than in many a proposition of physics, while in the words "God is love" it would, so far as I can see, have reached a vanishing point.

Apart from this, however, we have no cause to hide the fact that eschatological expressions are symbolic in a degree that is, within theology, special and abnormal. Admittedly robes and palms and songs, pearl gateways and crystal rivers cannot be taken in a literal sense, nor can such a text as "I will give to him to sit down with Me on My throne." But is this to say that no true statement regarding the future can be

<sup>1</sup> *Esquisse d'une Philosophie de la Religion*, 390-400.

made? By no means. To begin with a fact easily overlooked, symbols not merely often but always have a quite definite meaning. Each symbol is a soul in a body. When it is remarked of a distinguished public man that he wore his laurels with becoming modesty, or of a thief that he showed his pursuers a clean pair of heels, the use of highly figurative language in no way hinders an entirely plain sense. Such phrases, it is true, do not give an exact photograph of the event; none the less they are understood by every person tolerably familiar with the matters in question. This existence, within the symbol, of a distinct thought is signalled very clearly by the fact that symbols undergo a continual process of criticism and refinement. The mind can criticise symbols because it has made them, and made them for its own ends; it knows what they are trying to say, and, as thought advances, discovers how it may be better said. For us this means that Christian believers possess, in their faith, the key to unlock symbols which to others may be dark and non-significant. Communion with God has rendered them familiar with what logicians call "the subject of discourse," enabling them to test the validity of figures by reference to the supreme reality of which all are but partial expressions. So that even when what is transcendent is expressed in terms of this world, we are not left without a guiding principle. And the task of Dogmatic, in this region, is less to strip away the picture than to become fully conscious of it, and, when it is outworn, to replace it by one more worthy.

We are thus entitled to use eschatological symbols freely, provided that our symbolism is in consonance with the Gospel. If we speak in faith, our words will have a valid sense, a sense



capable of verification by the best Christian feeling. It would not help us in the least to discard the loved ancient phrases, "In my Father's house are many mansions," or "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes," as being fatally metaphorical; on the contrary, we should lose immensely by parting with expressions so natural and so sincere. If we select a poem dealing with life beyond the veil, can we say it would gain *in truth* by the removal of all symbol? Take, for instance, Vaughan's familiar stanzas beginning—

"They are all gone into the world of light,  
And I alone sit lingering here."

Can it be maintained that symbolism is in this case a hindrance to truth, and not its choicest and most transparent medium? Who will venture to extract the substance of Vaughan's thought, and exhibit it in more adequate form?

The question of symbolism, however, is suggestive of a graver difficulty. How shall we test doctrines of eschatology, and prove them true or false? Is there a practical criterion? It cannot, of course, be Bible language chosen at random. On this point the manifold character and content of Scripture eschatologies is conclusive, forming, as it does, a problem which even the dogma of verbal inspiration could not in the least relieve. Synoptic conceptions of the last things are not precisely those of St. Paul, or St. Paul's those of St. John. We need only consider New Testament declarations as to the woes of the last time, the coming of Antichrist, his overthrow, the first resurrection and the second death, or the millennial reign of Christ, to feel the utter hopelessness of erecting the Bible text into a final and statutory code. To attempt to force upon modern intelli-



gence the whole unsifted mass of Bible conceptions has the effect of bringing down the edifice of Christian hope in ruins. There are elements in the representation which have no power to evoke faith; nothing in the soul echoes to them; they are not felt to express any vital aspect of salvation; they are not made sure to the mind by the witness of the Spirit. Quite apart from the Old Testament, as to which there will be no dispute, there are details even in the New Testament picture of things to come for which it is impossible any longer to win the interest of Christian minds. Can we assume, indeed, that St. Paul had finally adjusted his conclusions on each point? And must we not allow for idiosyncrasy in the apostolic thought? We surely must: and surely we may also hold that even an apostle may be poet enough to stare at the literalism of the commentator. It will not do to proceed on an *a priori* view which puts the creative message of the Gospel on one level with any and every inherited conception of Rabbinism or Apocalyptic.

Yet there is a criterion, and it may be formulated quite simply. It is the very criterion we use elsewhere in doctrine; and it is as good for eschatology as for truth about providence, or sin, or atonement. It is the Person of Jesus, in His sovereign redeeming power, as apprehended by the faith which in Him finds God. Belief concerning the last things, accordingly, is part of our confession of the Saviour. As we strive to separate kernel and husk in old tradition, we must again and again put the question, What truth, on this point or that, is certified to the soul by faith in Jesus? What ideas are echoed by the redeemed spirit, gaining free and spontaneous assent? The question how we know a true eschatological statement when we see it can only

be answered by reference to the same standard of truth as governs Christian doctrine as a whole—the Gospel in its vital unity with the believing mind. To elicit and to systematise the utterances of faith is our task. It is not postulates of practical reason that we seek, or the speculative dicta of metaphysics, but the calm and triumphant certainties of the Christian soul.

## CHAPTER III

### THE RETURN OF CHRIST

THE *prima facie* suggestion of the Gospel records, as we have seen,<sup>1</sup> is that Jesus spoke of the Parousia differently at different times. He is recorded to have said not merely "There be some here of them that stand by, which shall in no wise taste of death till they see the kingdom of God come with power" (Mark ix. 1), but also "So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should east seed upon the earth . . . and the seed should spring up and grow . . . first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear" (Mark iv. 26-28). Taking one set of passages with another, we gain the impression that at one time Jesus expected the Parousia in the immediate future,<sup>2</sup> at another

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *supra*, p. 51.

<sup>2</sup> I am not prepared to reject the suggestion that Jesus' predictions of an early consummation—their authenticity being assumed—may have been, like all true prophecy, morally conditioned. We have no right to make the choice one between saying that the later Church unconsciously tampered with His words by reading into them its own hectic dreams, and pronouncing Him a visionary. All promises are relative to faith. By this is not merely meant that only faith can hear the promise given, which is true enough; it is also meant—and this is what matters now—that only faith is able to receive the fulfilment. Throughout all His life Jesus asked for daring faith in the infinitude of God. Hence

saw it far away, with an intervening period of gradual diffusion, at yet a third declared His inability to foretell its day or hour. In point of authenticity there is no appreciable distinction between these *logia*. If it be maintained that verses predicting an early Return show the influence of later Church thought, it may be also argued, in view of the contrast between St. Paul's earlier and later Epistles, that the tendency of Christian theology was rather to soften eschatological emphasis, and that we are scarcely justified in charging to its account those Gospel passages which, to us, are difficult. But at all events one thing is clear—if Jesus could ever speak of the End as distant, then, although sayings in another vein do occur, in His view chronology was unimportant. For the date of the Parousia He cared little; what He dwelt upon, in thought and speech, was its certainty and its abruptness.

In the literature of primitive Christianity the Parousia holds a commanding place. The writers of the New Testament are men who look forward

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we are putting out of our minds what may be a vital factor if we decide *a priori* that it is wrong to regard our Lord's references to an impending climax as a great challenge to believing trust. Are we in a position to say what might have happened had the challenge evoked the response He wished for? For a powerful exposition of this idea, see Professor Hogg's *Christ's Message of the Kingdom*. He writes: "It may be only to our foolishness that His great hope seems foolish. May the Kingdom not really have been at hand—not merely that beginning of it which actually came to pass, but its consummation too? May it not have been simply the incredible obstinacy of human mistrust that needlessly prevented what might really have taken place? Our Lord knew that with the Father all things were possible—that nothing could be too glorious for God. Would He not, then, have been false to His Father if He had counted an early consummation unlikely?" (pp. 36-37).

intensely to the great event; life for th, is ruled by a transcendent hope. Redemption as an experience, so far from making the Return of Christ otiose, renders it the chief object of anticipation. Only the first chapter of the story had been written. The Christian movement would grow by inherent divine energies to an end, and with the end Christ would appear in person to vindicate His universal power.

It is pathetic, as the New Testament moves on, to observe how the circle of those who may be privileged to behold the Parousia is narrowed by degrees. At first all Christian believers hope for it in their lifetime; then it is promised to "some"; finally, in the closing chapter of the Fourth Gospel, there is a guarded reference to the beloved disciple only: "If I will that *he* tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" But the postponement thus necessitated by the divine will would be short. Nothing in the least like the centuries of history was anticipated.

In later ages, during periods of acute spiritual transition, this hope of an immediate Return has often flamed up. Souls of an apocalyptic intensity have again and again foretold its imminence, and special prodigies or tribulations have been regarded as the herald of Christ's final revelation as Judge and Saviour, one Church Father after another seeing in the events of his own day the promised tokens of the last things. The Reformation was itself an age of keen eschatological sensibility—a fact which explains much in the otherwise unintelligible apathy shown by the Reformers to missionary tasks. Antichrist has been discovered in a variety of popes, in Luther, in Calvin, in Napoleon; and, to take a last instance, Bengel saw reason to believe the world would end in the year 1836. Many people, when they

consider how often this vain attempt has been made to write history before it happened, are ready to dismiss the thought of the Parousia as devoid of recognisable meaning or spiritual importance. Let us ask whether it is really so.

By way of preface, we may note, the fact that the hope of Christ's Return has remained unfulfilled suggests one minor difference between true prophecy and apocalyptic. It is this, that apocalyptic fixes, often in artificial modes, the details of the consummation to which a given process is leading up, altogether irrespective of human conduct, one chief reality in the case; whereas for the prophet only the consummation itself is certain. The apostolic hope of the Parousia, therefore, illustrates a point of view which applies to every prediction in the Bible—unfulfilled in a certain sense while yet true in spiritual import. In a sermon on "The Illusiveness of Life," F. W. Robertson has stated this conception boldly: "God's promises never are fulfilled in the sense in which they seem to have been given. The promise in the letter was unfulfilled. For ages the world's hope has been the second advent. Yet the Son of Man has never come; the promise itself had a deeper meaning."

No one, then, can really teach the Second Coming *verbatim et literatim* from a text of the New Testament. Even if he imagines himself to be doing so, he has unwittingly introduced changes which deflect the initial sense; for the primitive expectation, as proclaimed in the Epistles, was that the Lord would come presently, before many years had passed. It is impossible to transfer *this* expectation from the first century to the twentieth, or to profess that in doing so we are speaking in the sense of the apostles. There is no reason to

suppose that any apostolic writer, in predicting the Return, was thinking of our age.

Does this mean that the thought of the Parousia has lost its religious significance for the modern Christian mind? Let us ask whether we ought to agree with a writer who said recently that "the Gospel of Redemption is incomplete if it fail to include the hope of Christ's Second Coming."<sup>1</sup>

First, the promise of Return is calculated to rebuke a false and superficial optimism. Nothing in the outlook of Jesus is more solemnising than the complete absence of what in reverence we may call sanguine or facile expectancy. When He spoke of triumph, as He did frequently, it was not as of something destined to occur within the present order. "My Kingdom is not of this world." Undeniably He foretold that the divine cause would make progress on the earth, but evil too is pictured as enjoying a real progress of its own. Tares grow beside the wheat. Nowhere is there the faintest indication of a peaceful conciliatory evolution of the Kingdom, gently absorbing hostile forces as the ages lapse. There exists a well-known modern type of thought which takes the perfectibility of human nature by circumstances as its working theory, regards character as the mere product of nurture and environment, and insists that the true path to the *summum bonum* for man is to conduct life strictly according to scientific principles. And even when ideas of this sort are put aside, owing to the acknowledgment of Jesus' supremacy, the prospect held forth is an earthly one. "The wonderful life promised by Christianity," says a recent author, "will, like all the inferior forms of life, realise itself through a process of gradual and orderly evolution extending

<sup>1</sup> J. G. Simpson, *What is the Gospel?*, 20.



over many generations of mankind. . . . We believe that there is in store for mankind a far higher and more joyful existence than it has at present; and we may even hope for the conquest in time of sickness and death." Now in this, in spite of elements that merit sympathy, there is something quite alien to Jesus' mind. The consummation of the Kingdom is not in the last instance dependent on human effort. It is indeed true that Jesus affirms the power of prayer to expedite the climax, for the Father's purpose is no iron fate, and in response to prevailing entreaty the End may be hastened. At the same time, nothing could be more unlike Jesus' thought than the hypothesis of a mundane evolution, moving to its goal by infinitesimal and homogeneous increments and completing itself in a certain form of specifically earthly life. For Jesus the new order comes from God, by interposition, when and as He may think best; the redemptive crisis is such as wholly to outstrip the powers of nature. Thus the idea of a Parousia recalls us to the divine omnipotence as the source of all hope. It insists on those points in life where civilisation cannot help us in the least—points at which nature invades our personality, bringing home our mortality and sinfulness as real things from which it is impossible we should ever be self-redeemed. Complete salvation can only be a new order from above.<sup>1</sup> It is the sense of this that gives, amid

<sup>1</sup> This is a very different view from pessimism, in its pseudo-Christian form or any other; for pessimism is the belief that already the world is intolerably bad and will steadily grow worse. Over against this despondency the Gospel places the truth that the world belongs to God, not to evil, whatever hold evil may have got upon it. But it also faces the moral facts of experience, which declare unmistakably that life in this world is a moral conflict from which no one in any generation, however

much that is fanciful, so poignant an interest to Father Tyrrell's last book. As he writes: "Shall progress ever wipe away the tears from all eyes? Shall it ever extinguish love and pride and ambition and all the griefs attendant in their train? Is it enough to give a man bread for his belly and instruction for his brain? Prolong life as it will, can progress conquer death, with its terrors for the dying, its tears for the surviving? Can it ever control the earthquake, the tempest, the lightning, the cruelties of a nature indifferent to the lot of man?"<sup>1</sup>

Out of the same thought, also, there comes a lesson for each new age of preachers. We set forth on our life-work deeply conscious of the infirmities of our predecessors. Only let us put the truth more credibly, we say; let us strip off the old superstitious orthodoxies and state the Gospel in modern terms, and men everywhere will listen and believe. A natural idea; probably no man worth his salt but begins by sharing it. But time brings disenchantment. It is the old world, we discover, and each generation has to face for itself the inexorably personal task of becoming Christian. There is no panacea that will rapidly sweep the masses of men under the power of religion—not the newest theology, not the pomp of Rome, not even the message of social reclamation. It is not the fact that the world has been waiting for us. There were brave men before Agamemnon; the Gospel was preached with truth and faithfulness long before we were born, and both then and now it has encountered that permanent impulse or tendency in human life

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distant, and whatever civilisation may come to, will be dispensed.

<sup>1</sup> *Christianity at the Cross-roads*, 120.

which the New Testament calls "the fleshly mind," and which Jesus saw persisting until the end of the world.

Again, our Lord's prophecy of His Return, as coincident with the arrival of the Kingdom in power, betokens a profound consciousness on His part of His own transcendence and centrality.<sup>1</sup> We underestimate the personal claim presented in His words about the future. As it has been put, "The eschatological hope anticipates a future in which the bliss and relief are mediated through the divine Christ. . . . The attitude of Jesus to the future kingdom meant neither a purely supernatural deity, nor an attitude of passive unethical expectancy upon the part of man, nor an order of things in which His own person was transcended."<sup>2</sup> His mind on this topic is quite clear. It is not merely that death could not vanquish Him; it is that He bent death itself into the service of His great mission, and even prior to Calvary beheld the Cross change into a throne. He laid His hand on all that should follow, saying, "It is Mine." Even there, in the final order, He would be mediator of the divine life. All that can be called salvation, here or hereafter, is the effect and outflow of His Person, and bonds of an indis severable strength will unite Him in the unseen to His obedient people.

Two supreme things are implied in this. (a) By thus announcing Himself as Lord of the future, Jesus indicated the reality of a vast supernatural order of love, wisdom and power, the stores of which are at His disposal, and on which His followers may draw. His supremacy is not merely ethical; it also involves transcendent energies and

<sup>1</sup> See Professor Andrews' paper in *London Theological Essays*.

<sup>2</sup> Moffatt, *Theology of the Gospels*, 69-70.

agencies. The Kingdom which He proclaims is "an order of things in which God's omnipotence is available to be freely drawn upon for the perfecting of the world and of human life." This, we may believe, was at least part of the truth underlying those elements in Jesus' teaching which ostensibly mean an early Parousia. He employed a conceptual form native to the Jewish mind to express His own absolute control of the future. What filled His mind was the assurance that after His departure the powers of an endless life would still reach men through Him; and it is necessary to recollect that the *nearness* of the unseen and divine, which Greek thought expressed in spatial terms, was more naturally set forth by Jewish thought in terms of time. My Father, said Jesus, is prepared to give now that which is perfect, and I have power to execute forthwith His perfect will.

It is in this direction, further, that the teaching of the Fourth Gospel appears to lead. That Gospel first marked the inclination of Christian thought to turn away from exciting hopes of an imminent cataclysm and to dwell chiefly on the living presence of Christ with His Church. The End is not forgotten, but the strongest emphasis is placed on the actual and verifiable coming of the Risen Lord to dwell with men. Whatever be the exact form of His words, an undertaking is given that they shall have His spiritual fellowship; the living grace that went out from Jesus in Palestine, banishing guilt and fear, will be enhanced by death, not lessened. Here is a fundamental truth embraced within the idea of a Parousia, which may be disengaged from its apocalyptic vesture. It is not the whole truth, as we shall have cause to note, but it is basal. It means primarily the existence of a supernatural order of

relationship; a kingdom or system of experience in which Christ and all who trust Him are united, and in which faith and prayer elicit miracle; and plainly enough it was this certainty that prevented the collapse of the Christian religion when hopes of an immediate Advent died out. St. John filled the gap by the great conception of Christ's presence in the Spirit. Recent expositors of the New Testament have too often omitted this absolutely vital fact, that the anticipation of a speedy Return was never alone, by itself, in the apostolic mind. From the very outset it was accompanied, and therefore conditioned, by the knowledge of the Lord's perpetual nearness in the sovereign power of His resurrection. Thus the Johannine eschatology may be viewed as a providential transition-point between the fevered dreams of the first sixty years and the long labour of Church history. It forms the bridge by which faith crossed into the centuries in which alone the lessons of time could be acquired. Nor was this "transmuted eschatology," as it has been called, alien to Jesus' own mind. He had shown Himself quite certain that His death would promote the cause of God, that He would approach His disciples after death as the Living One, that a Spirit inseparable from Himself would be amongst them, and that in the realisation of the Father's good purpose for men He was destined to have a commanding place.

(b) If, however, the fundamental truth here is that of a spiritual relationship between Christ and men, fraught with transcendent saving energies, the conception of the Parousia means also that this relation is to have a climax. The complete and universal triumph of Christ is as sure as His triumph over death. In the New Testament, Resurrection and Return may almost be called two sides of one fact. The world thinks that Jesus

has been disposed of; the Church knows that because He is risen, all will yet be confronted with Him. The Christian prospect is not exhausted in the going of believers to where He is, singly and gradually—a piecemeal draining of life into the next world. There will be a final manifestation of His supremacy in a mode recognisable by all and exhibiting the last issues of the divine redemptive rule of all things in heaven and earth. This is an ingrained element of apostolic faith. The Fourth Evangelist, for all his emphasis on eternal life as an actual possession, recurs as emphatically as the others to a last Advent, for which the Spirit's presence is no substitute, and which he nowhere resolves into purely immanent terms. He transcends the notion of a speedy Return, but he strikes as powerfully as ever the note of a Return at last.

In essence, this anticipation will always remain a vital element of Christian faith. It is no primitive fanaticism, it is part of believing hope toward God, to expect a real close of history, a worthy *dénouement* of the story of a world in which God has redeemed His people. The claim of Jesus as Saviour is impaired when this is left out. He is not thought of as filled with all power except as we look to Him to make His work perfect at the last. Salvation covers more than individual destiny; it is perfected only in the perfecting of the Kingdom, and Christ's perfecting of the Kingdom, coinciding with the end of this world, is His Advent. How it shall be accomplished, or when, it is not our interest either to think or say, but the fact lies at the core of faith. When we look at Biblical pictures of the End, characterised as they are by the abrogation of spatial relations, allusions to angelic influence or mysterious convulsions of nature, we become conscious that the



prefigured event lies in a new order of experience, and that to describe it in advance would be to limit the illimitable. Nevertheless, beyond these shadows, it remains clear that the good purpose of the Father cannot attain to full reality in space and time. The Kingdom is transcendent, and only under transcendent conditions—such as are in our minds when we speak of heaven and immortality—does it come to final being. We speak according to faith in Jesus, therefore, when we affirm that the realisation of the perfect order will be mediated through a final revelation of what He is. He who is now creative and central in redemption will continue to be so when God brings in the world in which the new humanity may dwell.

Conceptions of uniformity and evolution, however, have produced a modern mind which even in many Christian representatives is hostile to all ideas of climax or crisis, in the soul or in the world. It is held that process is constitutive of all reality which our minds can apprehend, and the apostolic thought of a regenerated universe, implying the transfiguration alike of spirit and of its environment, is put aside as devout poetry. Yet if we start from Christian premises, if we understand what a perfect conclusion from them would involve, it is hard to see how its arrival could be anything else than a genuinely supernatural event. It will not come out of the world; it will come from God. "The second coming," writes Haering, "is not an event within the present course of world-history, but it is its close."<sup>1</sup> Or, to put it otherwise, the final Kingdom is not something which now co-exists with the earthly evolution as the Church triumphant does with

<sup>1</sup> *The Christian Faith*, 901.



the Church militant. It replaces the development it has closed. But this means a transition which can only be described as a miraculous transformation.<sup>1</sup> There may be crisis for the world as conversion or death shows there may be for the single life.

To this there is no alternative but one that holds out a future in which faith cannot rest. Imagine the present order to persist; then, even if sin be destroyed, everything will remain to which we give the name of accident or calamity. No reason can be thought of why personal holiness should produce a radical alteration in the constitution of the physical universe. It had no such effect in the holiest life ever seen upon the planet. But a world in which pain and death persist is not what Jesus meant by the Kingdom of God. That is a world in which the divine omnipotence has free course in the complete expression of holy love.

Still further, we must deny that a society marked by sinlessness or perfect morality can ever be realised on earth.<sup>2</sup> It is not pessimism to say

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Herrmann, *Communion with God*, 96.

<sup>2</sup> It may be asked in astonishment how any one who takes this view of earthly possibilities can believe in social reform. This, it will be noted, is an objection which at bottom assumes that if Jesus really believed in a Parousia, near or distant, His ethics *must* be an *Interimsethik*. Its quality must be affected by His view of the future. For this general contention there is no ground, and we need not delay over it; the morality characteristic of members of the Kingdom is what it is irrespective of all questions how or when the final phase of the Kingdom is to be established. But as regards social reform two things may be said. First, we have Jesus' command to help our brethren, and obedience to this is equally essential whether we do or do not believe that by our help we can give them *complete* happiness. To take the analogy of the individual, shall we say that a Christian is relieved

so; it is sincerity. Apart from all positive transgression, many grave omissions of duty are occasioned by weakness of the flesh, and it is mere trifling to forget that moral evil consists in what we leave undone as much as in what we do. We are unable to conceive a Christian life on this side of death which had no failure to confess. Besides, life apart from society is an abstraction. And can it be forgotten that what we call a "generation" cannot inherit the goodness of the past except as through discipline and endeavour it makes that goodness its own? The generations, moreover, are not in any rigorous way successive; one overlaps the other, and the condition of the world at a given moment is marked by rudimentary moral attainments in large numbers of people as well as by advanced ethical life in some others. The prospect open to humanity, therefore, while existing conditions obtain, is unquestionably that of general spiritual progress, but such a progress as can never in itself, by the

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from the obligation to be good because he knows he will never on earth answer to Christ's ideal, "Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven"? But the obligation of social reform is as real as that of personal goodness. All we need know is that it is always in our power to make things a little better. Secondly, it is precisely because we have a Saviour great enough to make things one day utterly good and right that the moral energy necessary for great social tasks is generated in the soul. God would not put us off with a salvation which could be entirely realised in present conditions, and this very conviction is the source of true and patient service. As Haering puts it: "From all external optimism the Church is preserved by her principles: the Kingdom of God will never be perfected on this earth. But faith in the eternal consummation through the full revelation of Jesus Christ should be the greatest stimulus to the utmost exertion of all one's powers for the introduction of a better earthly future" (*The Christian Faith*, p. 909).

addition of *more* of that in which progress has hitherto consisted, lead to a perfect society.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the rejection of an ever higher goodness, by those who do reject it, both implies and causes an always deeper evil. Hence the attainment of the final goal must be mediated through the interruption and supersession of the present order; and while it may be a question whether its arrival is rightly to be termed "abrupt" or "catastrophic," it is at all events something to which no sort of justice is done by the idea of homogeneous continuity. And to this truth Jesus' conception of a Parousia recalls us.

Moreover, apart from some such *dénouement* the course of human experience as a whole is devoid of ultimate value. It is not too much to say that the world owes the sense of history to religious belief in eschatology. Historic reality proper has no place in the Greek or Roman view of things. A writer like Thucydides or Tacitus makes no effort to relate the series of events to any universal end, which all serve as means. Biography, or the life-story of a state or people within a famous period, is done with unrivalled skill, but upon the whole the tide of incident ebbs and flows

<sup>1</sup> It is hard to see why perfection in the society should be looked for from protracted development; in point of fact, it is not thus attained in the individual. In the case of the individual there comes a climax, named death, which, as Christians hold, gives what can never be given by any development. There is continuity of personal life in and beyond the change, but also there is discontinuity of conditions. Similarly it is permissible to believe that the present phase of the Kingdom may terminate in a sudden crisis of fulfilment. Probably the anticipation of earthly social perfection is in part due to a false use of the phrase "social organism"; it being forgotten that "organism" is here only a metaphor, since the self-conscious members of society are perpetually changing and their place being taken by new arrivals.

without adding anything of importance to the meaning of the world or revealing any universal purpose which is more than the process itself.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the Hebrew prophets look for a future in which the will of God is realised. They stand for the truth that some supreme value attaches to the product of time, and representing as they do the first emergence of the idea of history as such, they are able to form the ethical conception of *Humanity*, moving onward, not with aimless feet, but to a destiny guaranteed by grace. From this time on the race is conceived as a unity, and the ground of unity lies in the plan of God. Thus the eschatology of the New Testament is but another name for teleology at its highest. In the light of Christ's Return, the darkness of pessimism is absorbed.

It is this reference of history and its issues to the purpose of God which alone provides a bond of continuity between present experience and the great future to which faith has always looked.

<sup>1</sup> Greek thought disliked the conception of an absolute or final order, and escaped it by making the movement of the world circular. There are allusions to this in Plato and Aristotle, but its ultimate dependence on a pessimistic view of the universe comes out most plainly in Stoicism. After a reference to Zeno's teaching that in due time the universe would be absorbed in the primal fire, Mr. Bevan proceeds: "He forecast the beginning of another world-process which would follow exactly the same course as the present one, and end, like it, in the one Fire. And so on for ever—for the present process was one of an infinite recurrent series—an everlasting, unvarying round. We may wonder that the human mind has acquiesced in such a view of things, even when we allow for its recoil from the notion of an absolute end; but it has done so not in Greece only, but in India, and even in modern Europe." Those, however, in modern Europe who have embraced the hypothesis of the Eternal Recurrence have never pretended to regard the world-process as governed by rational purpose" (*Stoics and Sceptics*, 51).

The final summing up of all things in Christ, on which Pauline thought rests as an unsurpassable height, suggests to the imagination the coming of a time when creation as a whole will be constituted the serviceable instrument of personality made complete through fellowship with God, and, in Him, with His people. Nothing will remain in nature, civilisation, or social environment that impedes spiritual life or mutual service. This has been the divine aim from the first. History, which has had its centre in the work of Jesus, will in closing pass beyond itself into a system of redeemed experience which preserves the fruit of earthly discipline and at last offers, to free and conscious spirit, room for unconstrained self-expression. Everything in this is as ethical as redemption here and now. And perhaps its ethical quality may give us light on the question why the Advent, so passionately hoped for, is delayed. If the Gospel can only be propagated in moral and social ways, if its progress is conditioned by human influence and is relative to the moral attitude of men, the conclusion of the whole cannot be reached in haste, or achieved before the truth in Jesus has been given an opportunity to reveal its inward riches. To this principle, as it seems, we are led by the New Testament prediction that the good news of the Kingdom must be preached throughout the whole world before the end comes—a suggestion underlined by St. Paul when he asks, respecting the eventual conversion of the Jews, "If their exclusion is the reconciling of the world, what shall their admission be but life from the dead?" (Rom. xi. 15). The thought of redemption as mediated through personal life and enriched by the mutual giving and receiving of all saints, so far from rendering a definite climax otiose, makes it indispensable;

since the value of the entire movement only becomes visible in the light of its culmination.

Thus the final revelation of Christ, who is the key of human history, and gives its last meaning to the universe, is necessarily construed in a twofold reference. It looks backward in so far as it consummates the redemptive activity of God; it looks onward in so far as it leads over, by creative transformation, into the perfect order from which all that is inconsistent with holy love is excluded, and in which disparate and hostile interests, born of earthly conditions, are finally reconciled in or withdrawn from the life of sons of God.

It is a great prospect, so great that nothing but a regenerating faith will dare to ascend the heights from which it can be seen. Our answer to the question whether Christ will yet do more must be determined by our conviction of what He has already done. Triumphant hope is generated by a divine presence in the soul. *We through the Spirit by faith wait for the hope of righteousness.*

Christian fancy is apt to play about this theme, not simply or mainly in sense-forms, but in modes taught by the best it has learnt of the Father. Thus it is uplifting to think that the revelation of Christ in the End may signify a great offer of divine love to those whose eyes till then have been holden. There may be a new and resounding call of the world to God; a convincing disclosure of a Christ hidden before by false doctrine or the disloyal lives of followers; the unreligious doer of duty seeing God and in one instant made religious because now understanding "whose is the authority which he has been obeying, whose is the strength on which he has been really resting all these years." Upon the very borders of the eternal life, one sight

of Jesus as He is may abolish all doubt, all fear, all reluctance. In such dreams, assuredly, there is no harm. But if it should be so, it will none the less be the Gospel on which men lay hold. Nothing which may transpire to reveal the sweep of salvation as wider than had been known can impair the truth or value of that which has been already told in Jesus the Crucified. All who then respond to Him, if such there be, will respond through moral and spiritual motives.

If, in conclusion, we ask what service has been rendered to Christian life by the anticipation of the Lord's Return, the answer, I think, may be put thus. It has emancipated the mind from purely individual interests, and has gathered believing hopes round the fortunes of the Church. As long as the piety of an age is deep, strong, and fed directly from the New Testament, it will reject the idea that in this region faith is concerned solely with the private destiny of the single life. And the Parousia confirms this instinct, for it is to the redeemed society, not to any single person, that the promise of it has been given. When the Second Advent comes into mind, the proper object of desire and longing is not the lot of particular lives merely, much less our own, but the purpose of God to perfect His Kingdom and glorify His saints.



## CHAPTER IV

### DEATH AND THE SEQUEL

ON any view not constructed to omit plain facts, death is an episode of inexpressible meaning. Of many people, not less brave or sensible than their neighbours, it would be true to say that death is never out of their minds; of others it may be asserted that the most real thing they ever do, and the saddest, is to lie down and die. In the great literature of the world death figures as the last sombre enigma, before which man halts in dumb anguish or proud defiance, resenting its approach as that of a cruel and unnatural intruder, even when it closes a long, happy life. Contemplated at this angle, which is that of the vast majority of the human race, it is the focus of tragedy, the one incalculable woe, giving the lie to every secular optimism. Death, in short, is a reality so towering that shelter from it can be found in neither words nor silence. And those whose faith entitles them to assign to it an ultimate value, thus subsuming it under universal purpose, possess an inestimable advantage, alike in life and in argument, over all for whom it is the synonym of ruin.

The traditional interpretation of death, in Christian theology, makes it a penalty consequent on the Fall. This is probably accepted as it stands by comparatively few living thinkers. A

modern view, which owes much to Ritschl, pleads that for redeemed men death no longer contains any punitive quality; it has lost the character of *evil* for the Christian mind, inasmuch as it once for all liberates the renewed spirit from every mundane impediment or burden. This has often been denounced as facile, but it has a close similarity to some beautiful words of the Westminster Longer Catechism. "The righteous," we there read, "shall be delivered from death itself at the last day, and even in death are delivered from the sting and curse of it; so that, although they die, yet it is out of God's love, to free them perfectly from sin and misery, and to make them capable of further communion with Christ in glory." Ritschl and the Westminster divines would agree, no doubt, in holding that death is punitive for men who have not faith. That is beyond dispute; the case is one in which a thing simply is what it is felt to be, and it is undeniable that for those who put Christ aside the threatening and lamentable aspect of death remains. But is it punitive in any sense for Christians?

The punitive quality, if present, can be present only in subordination to higher truth. According to a great Pauline word, death is swallowed up in victory. And yet, even for a Christian death is laden with the significant tokens and memorials of sin. To the end, as one has said, it is a voice that speaks of responsibility. When to men of believing temper it has seemed a horror, an indignity, the last enemy, the king of terrors; when they have anticipated with solemnity the last indescribable sinking of nature, the overshadowing fear, the rending of the roots of being—this is not the result merely of weak faith or beclouded insight. It is in part a just conviction that such an exit from the world does not perfectly become

children of a heavenly Father. Thus something of chastisement remains even for the faithful. It is not penalty for them as it is for one who cannot perceive divine love in it; for they have been pardoned, and the guilt to which alone punishment proper is relative has been cancelled and put away. But enough of weakness and corruption is in it to keep us humble, and in the noblest triumph over death a sub-current is found of trembling confession. There is a stooping of the soul to a law of the divine method: "Every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." And thus all that may be felt of appointed correction in the last earthly experience is overcome and transcended not by the daring stretch of imagination that looks beyond it, or the Stoic apathy that will not acknowledge its reality, but in the lowliness of faith which says, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him." Very specially it is overcome through union with One who, when tasting death for every man, passed beyond the bitter cry of desolation to quiet words of self-committal into the Father's hand.

Thus death and dying will always be a subject for the Christian preacher. It is the one form of suffering no one can escape, and this it is sentimentalism to ignore. No preacher who faces reality can ever forget those who habitually regard death as a lonely voyage into the dark. These he will strive to enlighten as to its meaning for their relationship to God; it will be his aim to bring them out of levity or despair into triumphant hope. But not less plainly he will speak of its deep promise to faith, of its significance as the final task by the Father, the summons to Christ's weary soldiers, the great transition which sets free the hidden powers of the soul. It must be

shown that even death is gain. "To be with Christ, which is *far* better"—it is not in every mood, or at every stage of life, that we can say this either to others or to ourselves. Yet there comes to believing men a settled temper in which they can say it—can say nothing else, indeed, as the infinite prospect rises up before them.

The Intermediate State was a subject of anxious questioning in circles of primitive Christianity, and this anxiety St. Paul felt it quite worth while to treat considerably. He would not brush it aside as a foolish curiosity, but dealt with it as he could. The dead, he wrote to his converts, have no more than the living passed out of a saved relationship to the Lord. They are not far from Christ; they are with Him, for at the last He will *bring* them to meet the survivors. This is a note which recurs in the Pauline writings. From a Saviour like his St. Paul anticipated nothing but the best and highest. God, he knew, would not bid him be satisfied with partial or piecemeal redemption. When he is moving at the supreme height of faith, and looking across the gulf of death, he sees life full, immediate, and everlasting in company with Christ. Reunion with Him fills the prospect. This incontestably makes an impression very unlike that left by various shadowy suggestions often put forward in later times, to the effect that between death and judgment the soul must traverse an indefinite period of maturing or purifying, in preparation for the vision of God. Quite apart from Roman ideas of purgatory,<sup>1</sup> the

<sup>1</sup> As to the Romish purgatory an incisive writer has said: "The object of detention there is not to teach wisdom by suffering, or to train weak wills towards good. The will of the 'holy souls,' it is expressly taught, is already from the moment of death perfectly fixed towards good.

notion is tolerably familiar in Protestant books that the departed spirit, to be made presentable before God, must undergo, after death, a certain process of resting or ripening. In the Father's house is a vestibule, and there the new guests must wait awhile. Is not this one more instance of unwillingness to believe that in Christ we are offered a complete salvation? Does not the sudden insertion of a preliminary period imply that grace is conditioned in God's offer of it by man's ethical achievement, and even in a sense that we shall then be further off from the Father than now? Now, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; then, there will be felt barriers and partitions. Any one who believes that men are forgiven only in so far as they are forgivable, that redemption is something provisional and as it were divisible into parts, and dependent on rather than creative of the holiness of the receiver, will no doubt find it a natural thing that Christian souls should mature in a place of preparation, as being unfit to meet God instantly. But in this what strikes one most is its unlikeness to the New

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You can no more sin in Purgatory than you can sin in Paradise. The only object of Purgatory is to be not purgative, but simply retributory; you are paid out there for sins for which you have not paid a sufficient mulct in temporal suffering before death" (A. E. Taylor, in *Mind*, for July 1912). This is put somewhat too sharply. To say that "the only object of Purgatory is to be not purgative but simply retributory" does not quite accurately represent the tone of Roman dogma. Thus in a Bull of Eugenius IV (1431-1447) it is declared: *Si vere pœnitentes in Dei caritate decesserint, antequam dignis pœnitentiæ fructibus de commissis satisfecerint et omissis, eorum animas pœnis purgatoriis post mortem purgari*, where the purgative character is plainly asserted. Still, the emphasis is almost wholly laid where Professor Taylor lays it.

Testament. The glory of the authentic Gospel is that the love of God does not wait upon our fitness. It gives all, and only gives, and by this giving in lavishness and without calculation it makes men like itself. "Fitness" is a thought born of morality, not religion; and neither in this life nor the next can the believer accept it as indicating or controlling the relation of the Father's mercy to human need.

At this point there emerges the old problem whether we can regard it as really credible that "the souls of believers are, at their death, made perfect in holiness."<sup>1</sup> Many people, conscious of the short limits of knowledge, will ask whether this has any reality that our minds can apprehend. Are not all the probabilities in favour of saying that we shall start again very much where we left off here? How is it possible that the long work of sanctification, advanced on earth but a little way in many years, should complete itself fortuitously and in a moment? Was the dying thief made perfect in an hour? All that we know of moral life, and the normal changes characteristic of it, leads us rather to believe that the interrupted task will be resumed at the precise point of interruption, but under conditions infinitely more hopeful. In particular, is there anything in the mere fact of death to induce a change so abrupt, so radical, so permanent?

Let us concede for a moment the force of these reasons, and only ask what then is before us. Apparently a second life which in essential quality repeats the life of earth. There, as here, it is obviously implied, we may look for effort and aspiration; with a measure of attainment, no

<sup>1</sup> *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, qu. 37.

doubt, but also with failure, discontent, and the same underflow of rebellion against relativity and frustration as darkens much of the present. There, as here, a warfare must be waged between the divine Will and evil powers operating in ourselves at least, if not also in the environment. Hope will still be set upon an infinitely distant goal, and this goal will form, just as now, the natural termination of a process of moral and social evolution. If the modern Christian mind is satisfied with a future life of this character, one can only say that it is not the mind that was in St. Paul. Nothing in such a prospect could ever evoke a joy unspeakable and full of glory. Nothing could lead an apostle to speak of it, in words quivering with passion, as radiant transformation into the very image of Christ. "As man grows spiritually," says Tyrrell, "he asks more and not less." He asks, indeed, a transcendent order of experience, in which desires after holiness shall be satisfied; "in which sorrow, pain, temptation and sin shall be done away; in which the struggle shall be explained, justified, and brought to eternal rest."<sup>1</sup> In short, a heaven which is earth over again—with evil, therefore with conflict, with conflict, therefore with possible defeat—is wholly inadequate to the premonitions of Christian faith. It is discredited from the very outset by the mere fact that we can conceive what is far better.

Moreover, it will not do to speak of death solely as a physical episode, with the view of disparaging its alleged purifying power. As Moberly has pointed out, we simply do not yet know the possibilities of humbling and cleansing discipline which may lie hid within the experience of

<sup>1</sup> *Christianity at the Cross-roads*, 125-6.



dying.<sup>1</sup> It has also to be considered that by death the soul passes into a life of felt nearness to God as much transcending the loftiest hours of earthly devotion as these do the first faint movements of faith in the young convert, and that death would not be death which did not abolish the tempting powers of the flesh. In the light of these presumptive facts, the suggestion that beyond the grave believers may at once find themselves above sin's reach will not seem precarious. Cases are on record in which men and women have been once for all delivered from the tyranny of a particular besetting sin through a sudden awakening to the gracious presence of God. Is it incredible that unimaginably close fellowship with Christ, made possible within the veil, may kill *all* sin then and there? Attained sinlessness is not, of course, equivalent to perfection. Much may rather be said for the position that it is only on the basis of sinless life that real progress towards perfection can begin.

The most formidable objection to older views on this point has reference to the notion of sanctification as completed at a stroke, but this point is, I think, fairly met by a further argument. On any theory which does not hold that sin in the redeemed is everlasting, it is difficult to see how sudden and cataclysmic moral transformation *somewhere* can be avoided. Let the soul retain sinful tendencies in the new life, and even there nothing better is in store for it than a *progressus in infinitum*. Advance never ends in full realisation. If struggle is ever to be crowned by perfect life, then, no matter how brief the last stage, only a miracle can bring it to a close, which would be equally miraculous in the case of mature and of immature

<sup>1</sup> *Atonement and Personality*, 114.

goodness. Sinlessness at death, in other words, is unquestionably a difficulty for thought, but the difficulty of sinfulness after death is, on the whole, much greater.

From the first the Church appears to have been in two minds respecting the immediate sequel of death for those who have not in this life attained to conscious fellowship with God. The veil drawn, in Gospels and Epistles, over the fortunes of such as have not faith is very dark. Yet by introducing, even in faint allusion, the thought of Jesus' mission to the dead,<sup>1</sup> the New Testament makes room for the hypothesis that death may not be for all the knell of opportunity. However obscure the Petrine words, they indicate that the notion of saving contact with Christ beyond the veil had crossed the writer's mind and not been rejected forthwith as unthinkable. Orthodox Protestantism, in righteous zeal against every view which makes the future of the soul dependent on the activities of an earthly priesthood, would hear of no reserves. The world to come was painted in two colours—pure white and black. Dislike of superstition became rigid dogmatism. It was proclaimed as certain that the limits of God's love are known; that they are fixed, in the case of *all*, by the soul's attitude to God at death; and that whatever is possible, it is not possible that Christ should be revealed to any who have left this world devoid of conscious faith. This is a negative certitude to which none can have a right.

It is not surprising, therefore, that hopes of future probation for some lives should now prevail widely. By certain thinkers the occasion for such

<sup>1</sup> 1 Pet. iii. 19; iv. 6.

probation is placed just after individual death, by others at the ultimate manifestation of Christ; and since we are in complete ignorance whether future existence at all resembles the present in temporal quality it is difficult to be sure that after all these views really diverge. At all events their divergence matters little; we are interested rather in their agreement that men who have not utterly rejected the divine love, and cannot be truthfully described as obstinately wicked, will after death hear the words of life and peace. The problem is clearly forced to the front by the felt lack of harmony between the universality of Christ's message and the fact that His Gospel, thus far, has been presented only to a fraction of the race. And relief is found in the faith that the resources of God are infinite. Heathen who have not heard Jesus' name, children who die young, imbecile minds, all those to whom the beauty of holiness has never been presented here—these, and others in like case, may look for something better than to be dismissed into the rayless night of perdition. The chance of being saved is still theirs, and for the Christian mind "salvation" has no apprehensible meaning except as it denotes a spiritual union with God, which is mediated through Jesus Christ. The attempt has occasionally been made to turn the edge of the argument as a whole by contending that even in this life all men do have the opportunity of identifying themselves with supreme goodness—that this, indeed, is plainly taught in the picture of Judgment with which Matt. xxv. closes. There, we are told, it is the Gentiles' record in this life which is made the touchstone of destiny. They had that in them, it is urged, which made its voice heard on behalf of goodness; and the way in which they have dealt with its appeal for those who needed services of

love will decide how it shall be with them. Whether this is the true sense of the passage much depends on the prior question who are the subjects of judgment—all mankind, Christians, or the non-Christian world; but apart from this, the suggested application leaves our feeling of justice unsatisfied. Surely the point is that if we say the lost heathen had their conscience, bidding them help the needy, and fixed their place in the eternal world by their refusal, yet we too had our conscience, making its appeal; and what alone availed to break us down and change our heart was the direct presentation of Jesus, over and above. What might not they have become, had our additional privilege been theirs? There is no real equality in conditions between those who are rejected on the score of failure to obey conscience and those who besides encounter the influence of a Person able to save to the uttermost. Let them meet Jesus, somehow and somewhere, let them feel the unique and amazing power to evoke faith which, as all believers know, resides in Him, and who shall say they too may not answer Him with trust and love? And what is true of heathen lives is credible also in the case of others among ourselves who, so far from definitely rejecting Christ, have, through the apathy of His followers, missed all real contact with His grace.

It is said that any such hypothesis must destroy the value of preaching, but why should this be so? We are not now considering those who have distinctly faced the Gospel, set forth in Christian lives or worthy evangelism, and have as distinctly put it aside, not because they failed to understand it, but because they understood it only too well. What is now said gives no colour to the suggestion that in the next life all men, without exception, will find a doorway opened wide into the love of

God. Nothing certainly could be more unlike the apostolic message. It is impossible to conceive a preacher thoroughly conscious of his obligations, yet exerting himself to persuade men that nothing of any consequence is fixed by this life, that we are not choosing to-day what shall be in the great to-morrow. That is to discount the moral worth of actual experience. If anything is certain, it is that procrastination in religion, the adjournment of decision for God to a more convenient season, makes it always harder to break with evil. It is the deliberate choice of illusion which even this life will unmask; is there any reason why it should be different on the other side of death? No; what we most need to have developed in us is the certainty that God is here and now. "He cannot ever be nearer us than He is, though we shall realise Him better. We are as much in eternity to-day as we shall ever be, though one day we shall know what now we dimly feel." The Christian preacher, therefore, is bound to be anxious regarding his hearers. If he feels as St. Paul felt, he will be afraid of what may come to those who turn away from Jesus and repel the great spiritual world of love and life and truth that lies around us, waiting to break in and transmute our souls. But the fullest recognition of this may be combined with the hope, or even the conviction, that Christ will one day be presented, for acceptance or rejection, to those who have not been permitted to know Him here. Those who cherish this hope—which they may nevertheless decline to put as a dogma—cannot admit that what they believe in is properly designated a "second" probation. At least, if the probation vouchsafed to Christians is defined by both things, the appeal of conscience and of Christ; if it is only because they have responded to Jesus that in the end they

are able to stand before God, then it must be conceded that a great multitude have not undergone *this* probation even once. "Future" probation we may rightly say, but not "second."

In conclusion, a single word may be added on the subject of prayers for the dead. It is easy to understand opposition to the practice if we place ourselves at the point of view of the Reformers, and it is doubtful whether any Protestant writer of standing can be found to maintain the possibility of abridging by earthly intercession the purifying pains of departed saints. There are many, however, to whom traffic in masses for the departed is abhorrent, who yet see no cause to fix a point, even at death, where they must cease to pray for loved friends now with Christ. While no one would claim first-rate importance for the question as a whole, it is interesting to ask what are the considerations which influence most defenders of the custom in their advocacy or practice of it. Broadly speaking, their case is based upon Pascal's well-known dictum that the heart has its reasons which the mind cannot understand.

Thus it is often held that prayers for the dead are meaningless, since we know not what to pray for. Our wishes may be out of all relation to the conditions under which the departed live. It is, of course, possible to conceive petitions to which this objection is fatal. But those of whom I am thinking would reply that it is scarcely relevant to a prayer, for example, that the departed may be near Christ and may ever know more of His glory. If it be replied that to ask even so much as this is to exhibit distrust of God, the answer has naturally been returned that, if pressed, this at bottom would be an objection to intercession as such, since the perfect and infinite care of God



is the presupposition of all prayer for others. But in neither case need any disposition be shown to dictate to God how He shall translate our wish into fulfilment.

Further, prayer for the dead has been defended on the ground that it is implicitly contained in prayer for the whole Church of God. If we take seriously our professed belief in one family in heaven and earth, by what right (it is asked) shall we draw a line of division between those within this family who may be prayed for, and others who may not? May it not be maintained that the instincts or intuitions of the Christian heart refuse to acknowledge such a line, and that dogmatic theory must be called in to silence them? If the perfect Kingdom has not yet supervened, it is possible that some ultimate consummation still awaits even those who are with Jesus. When we pray for the completion of the Church in glory, can we omit saints within the veil from our forward view? If they have gone before, and await our coming, it will be asked in all sincerity what harm it can do to pray God that their unfulfilled desires may be crowned with fruition. So the Prayer-book gives thanks "for all who have departed this life in God's faith and fear; beseeching Him to give us grace so to follow their good examples, that with them we may be partakers of His heavenly kingdom." And here the whole, it is said, must include the part.

Another point made by advocates of such prayers may be put somewhat as follows. They would maintain with profound conviction that it is impossible to think simultaneously of dead friends and of God without such a mental movement or tendency as is the equivalent of prayer. Thought in such a case is not thanksgiving merely, it cannot but be also intercession and commendation.



It might be a final step in this argument to hold that even impugnors of the custom under review may have their position refuted by a closer scrutiny of their own minds. By nearer inspection, possibly, they may observe their own thought moving implicitly in the way now described; and nothing embraced in the instinctive motion of the Christian soul is altered in meaning or value by being made explicit. These are, on the whole, the more important considerations which have figured in the discussion.

The issue, presumably, is one not so much for theoretic debate as for the most private and spiritual feeling. In any case, we may be sure men will decide it for themselves; and hearts overburdened with grief, as they follow the dead into the world of light with unspeakable longing, will not inquire closely, or too much care, what rules of prayer have been devised by men whose minds are cast in another mould. To the demand that they must set limits to intercession they will be apt to reply that they cannot break off the utterance of fond wishes at the grave. To them it seems merely natural that at will they should speak to the Father concerning those whom He has in His safe keeping.

“Who shall forbid the heart’s desires to flow  
Beyond the limit of the things we know?  
In heaven above  
The incense that the golden censers bear  
Is the sweet perfume from the saintly prayer  
Of trust and love.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Poems*, by Walter C. Smith, p. 175.

## CHAPTER V

### IMMORTALITY <sup>1</sup>

IMMORTALITY is in no sense an exclusively Christian idea, much less the cardinal point of Christian faith. This place has been given it by certain writers, as Lessing or Tennyson, who seek thereby to bring out its importance beyond cavil. But in their estimate two considerations are overlooked—first, that immortality was believed in and taught by religious men long before the Christian era; next, that in any case it is subordinate, a corollary to faith in God. Always the real question has been not whether we exist after death, but what kind of existence this will be. The problem of God and the problem of immortality go together, and the argument about each, roughly speaking, has taken the same form. It has been an argument not so much as to being or reality, as rather about intrinsic nature.

For convenience we shall use here the word “immortality” instead of “resurrection,” yet this does not imply that the idea of resurrection is now devoid of meaning. Its meaning is to be determined. True, resurrection is relative to body, for soul cannot be buried; and if we

<sup>1</sup> In this chapter I have embodied one or two sentences from my booklet, *Studies in Christian Truth*.

discard the notion that the glorified spirit will be reinvested with the very organism it wore on earth, composed of precisely the same material particles (an idea explicitly rejected by St. Paul in 1 Cor. xv.), it may seem imprudent to keep a word which invites that old misunderstanding. Our real interest is to affirm immortality—the life after death and for ever of the redeemed personality, sinless and individual, in union with God. Further, on a variety of grounds, the term “resurrection” is more wisely kept to denote Jesus’ special triumph over death.

At the same time, resurrection stands for truth of such certainty and value that we may be sure it will never be parted with. The whole man—soul and body in living oneness—connotes and embraces the effective human energies developed in and by his past life, controlled and unified by the self; and these energies, faith holds, will after death retrieve and reassert themselves in forms not now imaginable. To use St. Paul’s figure, out of the seed will spring a new ear of corn.<sup>1</sup> The total efficacy of a life, considered as a force acting on environment, is unmeaning apart from organism; and this efficacy will not perish; it will resume elsewhere its tribute to the life of the Kingdom. It is unnecessary to say, with Fechner, that the surviving spirit will be conscious of its influence as simply the etherialisation and extension of its body; but at all events his theosophic fancies remind us that an outer mode of being necessarily belongs to spiritual life as such, and that if we think away all externality, there is an end of fellowship. Thus belief in resurrection is a distinct, even if symbolic

<sup>1</sup> We must not appeal to this passage for theories: see Metzger, *Die christliche Hoffnung*, 51 ff.

assertion, that the life to come will be life in a body.

“The eternal form will still divide  
The eternal soul from all beside.”

The Christian mind has never been really cordial about a bare dogma of the immortality of the soul. It has felt that personal life can be re-established on the farther side only as spirit is invested, by God's gift, with a perfect organism.<sup>1</sup> Curiously enough, no one has taken this line more distinctly than Schleiermacher. So invariably, he says, are we conscious of the relation of our most inward and profound spiritual activities to those of the body, that apart from the idea of organism we are really unable to form any conception of finite spiritual life. We imply body, indeed, when we speak of an immortal *soul*, for spirit is defined as soul only in its relation to body. One main reason of opposition to this in philosophic circles is obviously the underlying prejudice that body as such—not simply matter—is a debasing burden or limitation. But we may reasonably think of it rather as a principle of individuality as well as a serviceable medium of spiritual commerce, in the absence of which souls “unclothed upon” would share no life but their own.

To mention the philosophers in a discussion of immortality is at once to be reminded that the topic is one on which they differ among themselves quite as much as other people. Plato can be set against Aristotle, Leibnitz against Spinoza, Kant against Hegel, Lotze against Wundt. It is idle, then, to talk of the philosophic verdict on the point, as if a unanimous opinion had been put forth authoritatively. Here I can only make a

<sup>1</sup> For a metaphysical theory of the possibility of this, see Galloway, *Philosophy of Religion* (1914), pp. 571-2.

brief reference to outstanding points in the long debate.

Speculative or scientific opposition to the everlasting hope is apt to place its first line of argument in a simple review of motives from which belief in immortality has sprung.<sup>1</sup> Much is made of the primitive fear of death and thirst for life. Feuerbach says we believe what we wish, and we most passionately wish to survive. Or resort is had to associations of ideas, characteristic of dream-life, where for a little while we are reunited with the loved dead, in scenes painted from daily experience. Or it is said that death was felt to be unintelligible; its reality, therefore, was imperiously denied, as offering to thought and will an end so dark and vain as to be intolerable. Or ethical incentives of a lower kind are detected—the political intention to stimulate good behaviour, a fierce longing to see justice done to our enemies, and a no less selfish insistence that our personal merit should be recognised. Best of all, and none too good, is a sense of rebellion against the failures of life, and a wish (which can never be cleansed from egoism) to retrieve what has here been missed or lost.

So far, however, the question is obviously one

<sup>1</sup> Most negative opinions on the value and destiny of the human self are rather due to a vague atmosphere of materialistic prejudice than to a careful scrutiny of the relevant considerations. Annihilation is called self-evident, because it is evident in no other way. The picture of the world present to many minds is determined by physical science only, and even a great psychologist like Wundt fails to rise higher. The proposal has recently been made to cure the longing for immortality, which is properly a disease, by so much improving medicine and hygiene that life will be greatly lengthened, and men will be only too glad to escape. They would gradually develop an instinct for death.

of psychological fact merely, not of truth. No investigation of the causes of belief is relevant as such to the point whether the belief is itself a right one. It may well be that assertions of immortality were at first due to motives largely egoistic, and it is certain that even the Christian hope has often been expressed in terms savouring of natural hedonism. But no chiliastic caricatures or primitive egoisms have anything to do with the real issue. Virtue is not discredited by the fact that a schoolboy may be led to virtuous conduct by hope of reward or fear of punishment, and no clear thinker can suppose that faith in immortality is lowered in moral rank by the fact that its meaning has often been very badly expressed. What is really of interest is to ascertain how far there is discernible in history a steady rise in the kind of motive responded to, with a gradual approximation to belief in immortality for its own sake. If such a rise took place, earlier motives become negligible, and the question now is whether the reasonableness of the world does not justify a belief found to be vitally associated with the loftiest moral achievement. Man, in that case, has no *right* to efface his own immortality before a universe, however vast. Not only so, but Christian faith is conscious that its eternal hope is not produced by any selfish postulate; it is the lowly and obedient acceptance of a divine gift.

Theoretic denials of immortality—and little is gained here by distinguishing philosophy and science—may all be reduced in the end to a single axiomatic principle. This is to the effect that experience shows not the faintest trace of soul-life apart from a material body. And if this be so, the two must in fact be inseparable. Of course, various points of view may seem to yield this

conclusion. It may be the outcome of materialism; but of materialism, as a reasoned theory, its philosophic critics have long since made an end. But it may also be a rider to the view known as psycho-physical parallelism. Let it be remembered that parallelism all but inevitably means a monistic metaphysic of a kind which, whether materialistic or no, cannot at least be accurately described as spiritual. The single being or essence underlying mind and matter is *ex hypothesi* not interpretable in terms of either; for it lurks behind both as an inscrutable mystery. Thus, in McDougall's words, "an important implication of all forms of psycho-physical Monism is that human personality does not survive the death of the body."<sup>1</sup> With the break-up of the series of changes we designate corporeal, the mental series also ends, consciousness and body being only two aspects of one thing. Our reply must be confined to these points. First, the Christian faith in another life is in no way at variance with the *actual* correlation of soul and body, as a fact of universal experience, but only with a specific theory of this correlation—a theory which, in any case, rests upon highly questionable metaphysical presuppositions. In revolt from the old difficulty of understanding how soul and body can affect each other, it really presents us with the two much graver difficulties of understanding how all apparent interactions can be mere semblance, and how a single basal substance can manifest itself in two modes which stand in no intelligible mutual relation. Secondly, it is illegitimate to bring forward the parallelistic theory as an accepted scientific view. It is, of course, nothing of the kind. Those who reject it find themselves in

<sup>1</sup> *Body and Mind* (1911), p. 194.



very creditable company, as may be seen from Mr. McDougall's imposing list of authorities.<sup>1</sup> The simple fact is that no modern theory of body and mind enjoys anything like universal recognition.

The more general argument, that spiritual life cannot exist apart from body, is itself a conclusion which goes far beyond the premises. We are only entitled to say that such a life is for us unimaginable. Personality needs organs or conditions, through which it is expressed; but from this it is a long step, and one which no law of thought bids us take, to say that no conditions but those now existing will serve. That is the argument *e silentio* with a vengeance. We commit no breach of logic, indeed, by holding that a higher type of organism may be in store for us, one more delicate and noble, better able to minister to or reveal the soul. To quote an illustration which, by its felicity, may seem to have something of the force of an argument: "The whole question of the possibility of the continuance of conscious life after the destruction of the body is simply 'this—Is the relationship of matter to spirit that of a cause as an engine's is to steam, or that of a medium as a prism's is to light?' "<sup>2</sup>

But if we thus repel philosophic objections to immortality, as resting on an unproved dogma, may we call in philosophy as witness on the other side? Shall we make the Christian hope dependent on speculative logic? Not if we are wise. The philosophic "proofs" of life after death resemble those for the divine being, on which they are modelled more or less consciously, in this particular that they apply the term "proof" to what falls

<sup>1</sup> *Body and Mind*, 204.

<sup>2</sup> Carnegie Simpson, *The Facts of Life*, 203; cf. Mellone, *The Immortal Hope*, 48 f.

far short of coercive force. The argument for immortality *e consensu gentium*, for example, is not invalidated certainly by the replies of savages to an unskilful cross-examiner, but its completeness is fatally undermined by the case of Buddhism, to say nothing of atheists or agnostics. The moral argument takes either the Kantian form, postulating an infinite life for the attainment of infinite perfection, or that of a more general contention that the unjust distribution of good and evil in this world needs to be corrected; but to this it has been objected, even by Christian writers, that virtue and vice *are* exactly recompensed in the present life, while even more formidably it is argued that unless our moral judgments are objectively true, and the good has real existence irrespective of what the future may contain, no real basis exists for theism. The teleological argument points to that in man which asks for perfect and divine fruition; but thinkers like Schopenhauer have accepted this, yet in a sense totally indifferent to personal survival. Finally, an ontological argument has been stated in two forms, a lower and a higher—the one analysing immortality out of the nature of the soul, as a simple immaterial entity which, having once entered on being, can never cease to be. Here it is a fair question whether the terms “simple” and “immaterial” do not also apply to the ultimate elements of matter, as science now conceives them; there is no necessity of thought, besides, to say that what has been must be for ever. Or stress may be laid on the immanent infinity of spirit, the unending potency of human thought and action; and yet the question once more is whether this necessarily involves the life after death of finite persons, while its force is much diminished by the fact that, sooner or later,

all human energies known to us pass into decay. Thus, as regards each argument we are forced to conclude that its value is a personal question, and this value will vary according to the respective dispositions, opinions and experiences of those to whom the argument is addressed. It is not that it contains no truth, but that the rays of truth, as has been said, "stream in upon us through the medium of our moral as well as our intellectual being."<sup>1</sup>

These arguments, then, do not force their way to an irrefragable conclusion. And yet they prove something. They prove how congenial the notion of immortality is to the human mind. They prove that the hope of a future life has a worth for us which nothing can replace. They prove that apart from such a hope the achievement of spirit must remain a torso. But the demonstration of survival they offer is scarcely fitted to convince all normal minds, or to compel the agnostic by logical necessity to confess that he is in error. Some minds will be utterly insensible to its force. And in any case the Christian will never consent to base the hope of life to come upon philosophy, for no philosophy goes far enough for him. It can never give a pledge of fellowship with God. At most it offers survival, not eternal life. It misses the vital fact that there are spiritual preconditions of faith in immortality such as can never be set out in syllogistic form. On the other hand, it is now equally clear that neither philosophy nor science can justifiably interpose a veto. Negative argument is fully met by positive. Here, as so often, the use of philosophic instruments in Christian theology is not to provide faith with new content, but to

<sup>1</sup> Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 311.

repel speculative objections; not to build, but to clear the ground for the builder.

Those who in these circumstances turn wistfully to the Society for Psychical Research really miss the point at stake. They argue as if any kind of immortality were desirable, but it is not so. To the Greek mind, death was terrible, not because it brought existence to an end, but because it opened an existence wholly devoid of warmth or interest. "Speak not comfortably to me of death," are Achilles' famous words; "rather would I on earth be hireling to another, a landless man of little substance, than be chief over all the dead."<sup>1</sup> And for Israel there speaks the voice of Job: "Cease then, and let me alone, that I may take comfort a little, before I go whence I shall not return, even to the land of darkness and of the shadow of death; a land of thick darkness, as darkness itself."<sup>1</sup> It was not extinction which these men feared; it was continued being, in the absence of all that made life sweet. Those who collect evidence of survival given by spirits through mediums seem unaware that they are engaged in resuscitating the old Hebrew notion of Sheol, and casting back to the primitive animistic belief in spirits, which has at bottom nothing to do with religion, and in any case is as different from the Christian hope of everlasting life as night from day. It is a nearly insoluble mystery how a refined intelligence like the late Henry Sidgwick of Cambridge, could, at least for a time, turn from Jesus Christ as Revealer of the unseen to Mrs. Piper, and spend weeks, and even months, in the hopeful investigation of her proceedings. The only immortality which can interest a man that has seen Jesus, and felt God's love in Him, has no

<sup>1</sup> *Odyssey*, Bk. XI. 488-490.

<sup>2</sup> X. 20-22.

point of contact with ghosts or rappings. His faith, born in conscience, is a living apprehension of the living God. It is the assurance of a man who in Jesus' presence has felt his own utter guilt and fragility, yet finds the gift of eternal life put in his hand by the Father. In this light, the spiritualistic argument will always be felt as immoral and repulsive.

The result of this brief survey is to confirm an antecedent impression that the true basis of eschatological certainty lies in positive religion. Mr. McDougall, who is convinced that belief in any form of life after the death of the body may be gravely menaced by the progress of mechanistic dogma, writes: "I judge that this belief can only be kept alive if a proof of it, or at least a presumption in favour of it, can be furnished by the methods of empirical science."<sup>1</sup> This may suggest indirectly that a scientific *disproof* of immortality would close the question; but it has no other force. The assurance of eternal life belongs to religion, not science. It is anchored in revelation.

So much is clear from the fact that belief in a blessed future arose in Israel not from logic, but through spiritual experience. It did not even come as an inevitable corollary from the acceptance of one true God, to whom death itself is subject; it came from fellowship with Him. Communion with God was at first mediated through priest or prophet, and, while this continued, the certainty of union with Jehovah on the farther side of death was lacking. Thus, to begin with, in the Old Testament there is on the future a silence that speaks: but no sooner had the individual felt

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, Preface.

the touch of personal divine care, so that he could say, "I am continually with Thee, Thou hast holden my right hand," than the conditions arose under which the knowledge of a blessed life for the departed could be won. Of course, it came gradually at the first. The resurrection of individuals primarily took shape as belief in the resurrection of martyrs. The future bliss was to be enjoyed on earth, and dead saints—those who had sacrificed everything for the good cause—would rise again to partake in a salvation which had visited the living. God was faithful, and would not suffer them to lose their portion in the Kingdom. Presently this was universalised as a doctrine of resurrection for all; all must rise, some to life, others to eternal loss. Apocalyptic struck the note of a real future for the individual.

It is only under similar conditions that this faith can be retained. When it has been lost, or is become enfeebled, it cannot be put back into the mind by itself. We must be sure of God, as the Father who has taken us into the relationship of children, before we can know that to this union even death can make no difference, and that Almighty Love will not suffer us to perish. The roots of Christian hope lie in the experience of sonship.

But in the New Testament eschatological faith has gained a new note of certainty, and quite as evidently its cause is the fact of Jesus. It was not that He provided better arguments for immortality; it was that in person He lived with men as a redeeming presentation of the Father. His disciples, who were Jews and had not been Sadducees, had no need to be convinced that man lives after death. Still, their faith derived from Jesus, in two ways, a new certitude and a new quality.



The first fact to tell upon them was Jesus' own belief. The deepest word in the New Testament respecting immortality is that word concerning God: "He is not the God of the dead, but of the living."<sup>1</sup> It enunciates a principle which Prof. A. B. Davidson used to call an Old Testament commonplace—the principle, namely, that to be possessed by God is a relationship that can never end. I have actually read a plea by an able man that the passage containing Jesus' dispute with the Sadducees must be late, because it makes him quibble like a Jewish lawyer.<sup>2</sup> Admit that in form it exhibits just so much subtlety as may enter in an *argumentum ad hominem*, what does Jesus mean to say? He says—illustrating the truth from far-off times—that he to whom God has once given His favour is one with Him for ever. If we were not so familiar with our Lord's words, I think they would astonish us. They reveal such a thought of God and of man, and of the relation of one to the other, as includes immortality as a simple part of itself. A God who at last could leave men in the dust would not be the God whom Jesus knew. That the dead are raised is for Him no longer a subject for inquiry. His words are not properly an argument; they are a revelation, as if it became Him not to argue. What He says is true for His own mind not on intrinsic grounds of logic, not as probably true, or partially true, but as absolutely certain knowledge, certain in a sense in which nothing else can be certain except His apprehension of the Father.

Can we overestimate the importance of this fact that He who knew God best, and most loved Him, was sure of the life everlasting? Say what

<sup>1</sup> See the whole passage, Mark xii. 18–27.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. J. Weiss in *Die Schriften d. N.T.*, I. 172.



you please of the absurdities which, in theology, have gathered round the belief; they all vanish, as negligible and irrelevant accretions, in presence of His faith. Earnest men will always find in Jesus' certainty a firm ground of hope which no speculative objection can affect.

Jesus' experience of God, therefore, is the last and final fact in this region. We may discuss immortality apart from it, but it is like discussing the chance of wedded happiness apart from love. Modern religion is in peril of drifting from Jesus' real thought of God, of keeping His revelation of boundless grace, but dropping out His faith in almighty power. Yet for Him the one was as real and sure as the other. Titius is simply reporting the mind of Christ as the gospels exhibit it when he says, commenting on His belief in miracle: "The world—nature—is in God's eyes nothing, and He alone is omnipotent Lord." We speak in His sense, therefore, if we say that the divine love, acting in man's experience, enables him to conquer death not merely by providing internal consolations, in virtue of which he dies bravely or uncomplainingly; it conquers death by lifting man beyond its sway. It overcomes the last enemy by inaugurating for those who die a new career.

The second fact to tell on the apostolic mind is Jesus' resurrection. Now it is a problem of great moment, what is the exact relation between the rising of Christ from the grave and our faith in immortality? The statement has been often made that the resurrection is the ultimate basis of our hope to live again; but, while this has a good sense enough, it is after all only an abbreviated expression. It is roughly rather than precisely true. In strictness, Jesus' resurrection is not the last ground of hope, for it is itself grounded //

in a reality still more ultimate. Long ere He died, Jesus knew that He would rise again, and He knew this because of His relation to the Father. It could not be that God would leave His soul in the grave. The same thought reappears in St. Peter's speech on the day of Pentecost. "God raised Him up, having loosed the pangs of death; because it was not possible that He should be holden of it." Why not possible? Because God is what He is, and Jesus His beloved Son. Hence, for the Christian consciousness, there is in this realm something more final even than the resurrection of our Lord. Behind the triumph of Easter morning stands the character of God. Everything, including that last victory, comes out of Almighty Love.

Yet while the resurrection of Jesus is not the final resting-place of thought, the place it fills in the array of evidences is crucial. It does not *prove* immortality, as if apart from it that hope had no sufficient ground; but it adds incalculably to its hold upon our mind. It is a tangible defence of our belief. It is associated with that belief in such a sense, so fortifies and illustrates it, that it acts as a vivid apprehension acts, giving it luminousness and force. The experience of Jesus was a test case, and, like every test case, it fixed a principle. It did not create that principle; yet it decided what it should mean for the world. We know that men are brave; but to see an act of heroism wonderfully quickens the knowledge. In like manner, he whom God is holding by His right hand is sure of life without end, but the spectacle of Jesus' actual resurrection gives to his prior faith a new intensity of feeling. It makes his hold upon it more living, so that he dares to apply it undismayed to the darkest aspects of experience—to sorrow, to tragedy, to ignominy

and pain. The world is now transfigured in his eyes. To St. Paul, as has been said, "the Resurrection is a great creative act of God, a new influx from the world of spirit breaking into the world of time, and piercing its dreams."

Nor can we fail to ask what the effect would have been had Jesus not risen. Had death silenced Him, as it silences all the rest, would trust in immortality have remained intact or unshaken? In face of such questions we better understand what is meant by saying that the career and experience of Jesus revealed immortality in being. The spell of death is broken. "The Lord's doing" is wondrous in our eyes—wondrous for its own supernaturalness, but also for its place in our minds as the great instance. It is one thing to know that spring is coming, because the almanac tells us so; surely it is another, some sweet April day, to feel upon the brow a gust of vernal air, with its mystic fragrance, telling that spring is here.

## CHAPTER VI

### FUTURE JUDGMENT

THE belief in divine judgment on human life is present at every stage of Bible religion. It is present not by accident, or simply as a bare item of information, but in virtue of what God is, and because the revelation of such a God must always come with the twofold aspect of mercy and severity. Thus in Amos and Hosea, the earliest writing prophets, judgment stands in the forefront of the new message, as a result and outgrowth of new vision gained into the character of Jehovah. The true prophet will not utter merely smooth things; even Hosea, ambassador of an unwearied love, declares to Israel how penitence alone can decide whether the future is to be for them a future of blessing or cursing. Further stages in the development of thought are the new individualism of Ezekiel, and the great forecast of the Book of Daniel according to which judgment, as ushering in the final Kingdom, begins definitely to be anticipated as a judgment upon all—a world-embracing fact. Thenceforward the advent of the Kingdom is uniformly preceded, in pictures of what is to be, by the judicial, sifting act of God. This is a note struck decisively by the Baptist. In later Judaism, the influence of Persia bore strongly on this general eschatological idea. But

after all Parsism supplied no more than hues and figures for the apocalyptic representation; the moral grandeur and solemnity of the thought is an old prophetic legacy.

It is clear that such an expectation, once firmly lodged in the religious mind, could not ever again be lost.<sup>1</sup> At bottom it is a moral certainty, and the religion which has once been suffused by a passionate moral interest must retain it or perish. To men who have begun to look for a great final inquisition, with some real appreciation of its certainty, its inevitableness, its sure and steady approach, life cannot again be quite the same. It is not merely that such a prospect deepens the gravity of living: for pre-Christian minds its effect was, at least in part, to dispel the shadows cast upon the divine righteousness by the prosperity of wicked men and the afflictions of the good; also to persuade those who took it seriously that happiness upon earth is not the chief end of man. This service, reckoned elementary by some, it did then for devout hearts, and it is a service believing men will always need to have done for them anew.

Yet it is to Jesus that we owe the idea of judgment in its profoundest and most spiritual form. In itself that is significant. Not infrequently a vehement protest has been raised to the effect that on this point, as on so many others, the Church has misconceived her Lord. The unclouded prospect to which Jesus pointed, we are told, was later darkened cruelly by predictions of a wrath to come. But the real facts are otherwise. It was not apostles, but their Master, who spoke

<sup>1</sup> It is through the emergence of the idea of judgment that primitive belief in survival was first combined with moral demands and valuations, and the way prepared for a genuinely moralised faith in personal immortality.

the words we know concerning outer darkness, the worm that dies not and the fire that is not quenched; who said that for the betrayer it were better if he had never been born. Whatever our prudent allowances for the figurative terms of description accepted by Jesus from His time and nation—still, figures have a meaning, and here it is a meaning that shakes the heart. We are compelled to observe in His teaching, as it has been put, “how large a proportion the language of rebuke and warning bears to the language of consolation and promise; the one is as grave, as anxious, as alarming, as the other is gracious beyond all our hopes.”<sup>1</sup> His purpose cannot have been only to scare the mind. He looked onward to a great fact, none the less sure that it is unspeakable, the appointed ordeal of “sin without excuse and without change.”

It is unnecessary to labour the point that the same conviction is presented everywhere in the Epistles of the New Testament. The writers knew they were to stand before the Son of Man. Part of their common faith is that “it is appointed unto all men once to die, and after that the judgment.” What is more, judgment is never alluded to as a discovery of their own, or as impending merely over the hostile world; it is something in which their own interest is vital and the reality of which has imposed itself on their minds in irresistible spiritual ways. They were as sure of it as of the forgiveness of sins. And in both cases, belief was generated by contact with Jesus. He had left an impression of God which exhibited Him as Judge in virtue of His very Saviourhood.

I believe that all this finds an echo in the conscience of those who have any sense of God as a

<sup>1</sup> Church, *Human Life and its Conditions*.

Power, not ourselves, making for righteousness.<sup>1</sup> No man can feel that God is, and is the moral law alive, and not feel that in due time He must express His whole mind regarding the ways and conduct of men. At all events, when future judgment is rejected by a moral theist as intrinsically unmeaning, the grounds of rejection must lie either in a special philosophy of experience or in a confusion of traditional thought about the thing with the very thing itself.

Thus it has been felt as a difficulty that the New Testament should represent final judgment as being committed to, or presided over by, Jesus Christ. How is it credible that before Him will one day be gathered not His followers merely, but all the nations of the world, or that it will then be His part to pronounce, with perfect insight, justice and power, the lot of each human soul? Doubtless there are forms in which this may be made very unintelligible. Our fathers felt it to be sublime, yet nothing really is sublime which does not evoke a spontaneous assent to elemental truth. But surely truth is given here of just that kind. If Christ is central as Redeemer; if in history as proceeding now He has certified Himself to faith as One on whose person everything turns in the relation of God to man—and the Church has no other message—He will be central also at the end, and no human life can be conceived as finally placed out of relation to Him as the all-

<sup>1</sup> There are few points in the organism of Christian truth at which it becomes so clear that since Jesus, and for His followers, the distinction of religion and morality is obsolete. All true arguments for judgment are the arguments at once of faith and conscience. Both insist that the failure and vanity of sin shall be exhibited plainly at last for all to see; both promise that faith shall be vindicated as the one right attitude of the soul to God.



determining reality. He is the Revealer of the Father, and from the revelation present in Him something definite and universal, something laden with the last issues, must eventually come, for moral reasons, to each individual life. If *any* decisive close be in store for human life, then, unless it were indissolubly bound up with the personality of Christ, we should have to regard the climax of God's dealings with men as strangely out of line and out of keeping with all the rest. There would be, as the only alternative, an abrupt and inconsequent change to a new disparate moral order, with caprice and incoherence fixing the quality of the whole. This principle—the principle of the moral continuity of life here and hereafter—is equivalent to the doctrine that the mediation of redemption is one with the mediation of judgment.

Some will deem this too speculative for a beginning; let us then make a new start, from a new point. It is not simply that death will place us before God, defining our attitude to Him unerringly; we are before Him now, and in the Gospel He is judging us as we live. Jesus tries a man by being what He is—the perfect Son, doing the Father's perfect will in life and thought, and thus standing forth as the great representative of our nature, its end and law. Here is a standard the quality of which is absolute. He was all this while He lived, but in addition there is to be considered His moral influence upon history. In point of fact, He has been judging men from the first century till now, in amazingly effective ways. The impact of His moral power on the world, for condemnation or approval, has been unceasing. Since Calvary, the world has had a new consciousness of evil. The fact that, as the Church soon perceived, He had died for slave, for woman, for

barbarian, at once began to pour an uninterrupted flow of moral criticism on human life and conduct, and this increasingly meant protection for the weak and perpetual reinforcement of the good. This is traceable, ultimately, to the personal conviction of believing men that at each point in life they are being tried by their attitude to Jesus; that His manhood is the criterion of ours, and that from its purity there is no appeal. Men have always felt that a present experience of this kind gives reason to believe in a future ordeal in which Christ will continue to be Judge.

Precisely this, however, is the crucial point which makes the thought of final judgment, even for some Christian minds, not so much difficult as rather futile and superfluous. To be frank, ought not this eschatological notion of a judgment to come, often mythically conceived as catastrophic, to be displaced once for all by the idea of the moral order of the world? There is a judgment, but it is wholly immanent; it fulfils itself to the last fraction in history. The best minds now think of moral life as an internally controlled self-regulating sphere within which certain relations operate unchangeably in accordance with laws of their own, so that any final scrutiny or verdict could only be an external and needless footnote to a complete text. At any given moment, and therefore at the end, character fixes our place. Virtue is its own reward, and the vicious man is punished by being what he is.

No one, I imagine, will deny that this widely held theory is expressive of a great truth. The faith that the constitution of the world is against evil, that the mills of God are grinding all the time and with inescapable power, is a form of the fundamental moral conviction that there exists an objective norm of value—the theist would say, a

divine mind of righteousness, whose view of the good or evil in human action is final and absolute, and in this sense abrogative of diverse and fallible human verdicts. But it is misleading to represent this true conviction as hostile to the idea of future judgment. For one thing, future judgment does not create facts; what it does is to recognise them as facts. As it has been put, they are not determined, but declared. Moreover, it is surely an important aspect of the case that the course of the world is, after all, a process, with all the partialness and inconclusiveness found in process everywhere. The good must win, but to say that its triumph will ever be seen *in the present order*, in such wise as to convince all human minds, is to say something for which neither reason nor faith, I think, will care to be held responsible. The results of a temporal process, in their permanent and final form, can be fixed only beyond the process itself.<sup>1</sup>

Not only so, but if we examine more closely the theory that spiritual laws are self-acting, that in history as it stands the moral ordinances avenge themselves to the last jot and tittle, exacting here and now the precise penalty merited by human conduct, it is extremely hard to reconcile with facts. Too many of the Psalms are filled with

<sup>1</sup> Troeltsch, in his brief note on "Gericht Gottes" in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, suggests that when Dogmatic lays aside the mythic forms of thought characteristic of Christian thought in the past, it will find divine judgment solely in the course of evolution. It is difficult to tell what is his criterion of freedom from mythic elements. But at all events the purely immanent interpretation of judgment to which he leans is little in favour with many writers on Dogmatic who are usually classed as modern or critical—as for example, Nietzsche, Reischle, Kirn, Kaftan, Wendt. What is true in Troeltsch's remark is that no attempt to paint the last assize dramatically, or in detail, has any greater credibility than what we call "myths."

sad complaints of the prosperity of the wicked for it to be supposed that the writers held any such purely immanent construction; and the effect of revelation, as it grew and brightened, was not to teach them that the world's history is all the judgment it needs; it was to cast them on God, who at last will vindicate the right. It is vain to brush aside difficulties due to the moral confusion of history by the plea that virtue and vice are their own recompense; that goodness, even when crushed by violence, is spiritually the conqueror; that evil, even when triumphant, is cursed by inward rottenness. Such a view has a noble sound, but it may represent a spiritualism of the most unwholesome type, in which the good man is bidden or encouraged to withdraw into the inward recesses of his conscience and abandon the world to the rule of injustice and misery. The only satisfying prospect is not merely that goodness should win an ideal triumph, but that it should prevail in outward fact. Not only its authority but its power must be vindicated; and the assertion of future judgment is a vital aspect of the faith that this vindication will at last be complete. But the radical weakness of the "self-acting" theory is that it is irreligious. Appeals to the Bible are in vain. To describe God as "an otiose Spectator of the moral universe, having no other function in relation to moral government than to watch and to approve the perfect manner in which rewards and punishments are distributed by self-acting spiritual laws," is a travesty of faith in the Bible sense.<sup>1</sup> To be even plausible,<sup>2</sup> as we have seen, this hypothesis must confine its

<sup>1</sup> Cf. R. W. Dale, *Atonement*, 326.

<sup>2</sup> It is not even that; for, as Charles well points out, the theory that a man is requited here by his present experiences is overthrown by the obvious facts that the better a man is, the less he enjoys the satisfactions of

thought of vindication to the inner life of man; but nowhere in the Bible is man's inner life ever considered by itself. There soul and body are a living whole, and in this whole of experience the mind of God regarding man is conceived as being registered finally. It is not finally registered in this world. "We see not yet all things put under Him." Hence the dictum that "God has no unsettled accounts, no outstanding claims," is really, and from the religious point of view, no more respectable than the better known "Whatever is, is right."

How firmly the religious consciousness clings to the expectation of a last judgment may be gathered from one of Ritschl's more peculiar views. His interpretation of the wrath of God is to deny its reality as a present fact, with the reservation that one day it will come into operation very drastically. He had no love for ideas of cataclysm, yet he held that there will in the end be a decisive and annihilating reaction on God's part against those who obstinately spurn His love. We need not inquire whether Ritschl's denial of the present wrath is in harmony with Jesus' mind or with the convictions of the Church; what concerns us here is his affirmation as to the future, which offers a new proof that when the moral character of Christianity is faced, the thought of judgment, as a moral certainty, is unavoidable. View our religion in a purely intellectual or æsthetic light, and it is easy to get rid of the last ordeal; take it as morally qualified from end to end, and inexorably the prospect of trial comes in.

Much opposition to a doctrine of future judgment probably results from the belief that such

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conscience, the worse he is, the more he becomes immune from its reproaches (*Drew Lecture*, 28-30).

a notion is incurably magical or external. It supervenes upon normal experience by way, apparently, of bare addition to what is already a quite intelligible whole. I have already spoken of this argument in its wider, and what may be called its cosmic, relations; but it is now worth pointing out that any force it may have is at once destroyed when the question is taken, as all questions of truth in religion must be, to the forum of personal Christian feeling. Let us take it there. Each one of us may say: I feel that judgment is a present fact; I judge myself constantly, and the ideal I see in better men judges me too. Further, I am always in God's presence, and when I sin the powers of His retributive yet loving will visit and chasten me, in outer or inner ways. Is all this, then, inconsistent with a final and conclusive judgment? Surely not, for at least two reasons. First, the mind of God upon our life has not yet been expressed fully, and there is no reason to suppose it will have been expressed fully by the time we die. Even at the hour of death it will be partial, as it is partial now. But if God is omniscient, and if my life here is over, why should it be impossible for Him to pronounce upon its value as a completed whole? Why should He not then reveal to me what I have made of myself? If He does this, what is it but final judgment?

Secondly, it may be argued as before, but now in the case of the individual, that judgment follows at each moment, automatically as it were, by the very structure of the spiritual world, apart from any "dramatic" pronouncement by a divine Judge. Personally I regard all these suggestions of an automatic working of spiritual reality as thoroughly unsound, for which Bible minds, who knew what religion is, would have had no use;



but, waiving this, surely the argument has no force except on the assumption that we shall never be consciously nearer God than we are now. Does the best religious feeling—as it exists, say, in high moments of prayer—confirm this? I think not: we know that we may yet enter His very presence, and bear on our naked spirit “that uncreated Beam.” Death, if it has any spiritual significance, may place us there. But if so, then there is in store for us a piercing realisation of God—one day to be as real as what is happening now—and to realise His being in this fashion, His holiness and His love, will be to gain a sight of our own nature which we shall feel to be His divine estimate of all we are. And because it is the estimate of God, in whom knowledge is one with power, it will entail for each individual life a readjustment, wholly just and gracious, of destiny and environment.

The moral interpretation of Christian life, then, is bound up with the expectation of a divine judgment. We can escape from it only by holding that nothing of a decisive kind can ever happen anywhere. That is a view with many intellectual attractions, but it has no point of contact with the moral sense, and whether it clothes itself in the doctrine of the eternal recurrence, according to which the wheel of change repeats its meaningless revolutions for ever, or takes the less distinctive form of belief in an eternal homogeneous advance no one part of which is specifically different from any other, in either case its quite unethical character is too plain for comment. If goodness and right are more than words, our attitude to them, our acts regarding them, though now lost and forgotten here, will revive and be found in a coming experience of trial. In the last manifestation of His grace—for judgment, too,



is the instrument of grace—God will treat each of us as bearer of a personal life, who by his exercise of will has formed a basis for his eternal relationship to God. The future cannot be the same for all; and whatever be the differences, they will flow from no external or accidental cause, but the righteous will of God. Each moment in which we set ourselves by conscious act before Him, seeing our sin, at least in effort, as He sees it, and speaking over it words of penitence and condemnation, is a foretaste and premonition of that last unveiling. As the pages of the New Testament show, this thought, that all is moving up to one great decision, imparts to what we do here the force and greatness of an eternal meaning. It is in this solemn light that all St. Paul's work is done. The certainty of judgment not only intensified his self-discipline; by its ennobling power it quickened his zeal, gave inspiration to his energies, and set the figure of the coming Lord at the centre of all thought and feeling.

It is striking to observe how clear was the apostle's anticipation that *he* would stand before the bar of God. When we talk of future judgment, it is too often as something ordained for other people:<sup>1</sup> but in reading St. Paul's words we are led to conceive it rather as what we ourselves

<sup>1</sup> In certain minds, doubtless, reluctance to assert the fact of judgment is traceable to a natural and entirely right feeling that we dare not anticipate the divine judgment on a fellow-creature, even in thought. When we attempt to take to ourselves the functions of the Eternal, to assign merit and demerit, good and evil, we are beset with difficulties which are, fortunately, quite insuperable; and as we grow older this impression deepens. More and more we perceive the wisdom of our Lord's prohibition of the practice of referring individual suffering to individual sin. But we are forbidden to judge regarding earthly trial or future destiny, not because judgment is unreal, but because in its august reality it pertains to God alone.

must undergo. We cannot be certain about the responsibilities of others, about ourselves we do know something; and in our best moments we are unable to resent the prospect of being tried by God at last. At the same time, this brings up a problem of some gravity. The New Testament has much to say regarding the judgment of believers, but what can this mean? Apparently it implies that a man's destiny, of life or death, is till then unfixed; yet, on the other hand, this cannot be if the promise of the Gospel is trustworthy: "He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life," and it would not be glorifying to the omnipotence of God but derogatory to His faithfulness if any faintest doubt were cast upon the veracity of that great word by postponing God's verdict on believers to the final scene. It would actually introduce a strain of unmoral caprice; for, the whole question being whether men are or are not in fellowship with God, and in that fellowship have already the earnest of the future, it is inept to suppose that the reality of communion could hang upon anything which transpired after death. Whatever judgment means for the Christian, it is not anything which can separate him from the love of God. But this does not alter the fact that in the New Testament believers are depicted as having before them a judgment in which they will be tried by works, not faith.<sup>1</sup> It will be a scrutiny of the whole outcome of life. And it is precisely this which makes the idea difficult. It has a look of incongruity with the truth of justification by faith—a truth which, in spite of some modern writers to whom the conception of free grace denotes moral anarchy, is the cardinal point in apostolic

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Stange, *Moderne Probleme des christlichen Glaubens*, 188 ff.

religion. How can it then be true that those who now have peace with God shall yet give an account of deeds done in the body? Is not this to lapse from grace to law? Is not the offer of grace a divine proclamation, as it were, that judgment is out of the question because, in a world of sin, it could only issue in universal condemnation? Moreover, we cannot receive the grace thus offered except as we own our unworthiness, as we declare that in the judgment of a holy God we have no hope to stand. It is a problem to give us something to think of.

We may find the answer, or great part of it, in the fact that even in present experience God's love and wrath are consistent with each other. We know this in every hour of penitence; we know it, if possible more clearly, when we look to the Cross of Jesus. There the Father's condemnation of our sin is as real as His pardon; it is, indeed, something without which His pardon would have no sense. In the very article of forgiveness He reacts against evil, and by self-identification with Him through whom the mind of God is mediated we are enabled to react against it ourselves. But there is no reason why we should suppose this condemnation of sin to be excluded from His attitude to believers at the last. No more then than now will love make Him blind. No more then than now can He speak to us of what we are, and have done, except as good and evil in our life stand out for His reprobation or approval, in perfect openness.

But the point is that judgment in this sense, real and searching as it is, is love's instrument, and serves love's purpose. It is by passing through it that believing men are finally delivered from the effects of their sinful history. Once for all, and for the first time, all things will have been

laid open between the Father and His children. The peril of guilty secrets concealed from Him will be gone for ever; the misgiving, too, lest He should have against us what we may suspect but do not perceive. To stand thus before God, His searching eye upon us—knowing the heart and thoughts, and telling us all things that ever we did—this is a precondition of perfect and unclouded fellowship. It leads into this fellowship, and it secures it. To be tried at last, in Christ's presence, may be truly designated as the last means of grace for the redeemed. There will be pain in it, doubtless, beyond our imagining—the purifying and emancipating shame of those who bend under the condemnation of perfect love, in full assurance that for all their guilt they will not be cast out. But our sin will then be shown us, not to torture us, but in order that more and more we may understand the length and breadth and greatness of His mercy who knows what is in man.

## CHAPTER VII

### UNIVERSAL RESTORATION

IT is a question of much interest, whether Christian faith involves *any* particular belief respecting the destiny of those who persist in hostility to God. If the doctrine of verbal inspiration has gone, and we no longer feel obliged to give a place to every isolated Bible statement, it may be contended that the gaze of faith is bent solely on the Christian prospect, and that about everything outside the pencil of light cast by Jesus, and visible only to His followers, it must be wholly agnostic. In the main, I should hold, this contention is sound; but a single reservation ought to be attached to it. Not even here can we escape from the logical principle that the knowledge of opposites is one. If faith predicates something of the redeemed, it must predicate something also of those who spurn redemption. The words in which their lot is described may be preponderantly negative, but they have a real meaning. Now the positive knowledge available for the believing mind in regard to "the obstinately wicked" may perhaps be put summarily as follows: It will be evil for those who are evil, as long as their evilness remains. If God be the Power whom we meet in Jesus, fixed opposition to His will must, while it lasts, entail suffering. This is true if the next life has a moral constitution.

But taking this principle, which comprehends, as I think, all the Church can be sure of regarding the adversaries of Christ, we find that, if we are resolved to have a theory, it may be applied in three forms or three directions, and that so far none of the resulting rival hypotheses is entitled to exclusive favour. First it may be said : It is evil for the evil, while their evilness persists, but it does not persist for ever, since all at last turn to God, saved as through fire. This is the doctrine of Universal Restoration. Next it may be said : The lot of the evil is evil, as long as they exist, but we have reason to believe they do not exist for ever. They, together with their evilness, are finally extinguished. This is the doctrine of annihilation or Conditional Immortality. Lastly it may be said : Evil beings remain so endlessly, and they endlessly suffer for it. This is the doctrine of Eternal Punishment. Whatever may be said of these views, at least they can all be subsumed under the inexorable moral principle just formulated. In different modes they all proclaim that as long as a finite spirit is in conscious antagonism to God, the fact will register itself in penalty. Nor is this penalty mechanical ; it is the reaction of divine holiness upon moral evil.

At this point two considerations join to support the general finding at which we have arrived. One is that all three views have been held by acknowledged Christian thinkers. The theology of the subject has invariably tended to work out in one of these three forms. Certainly this does not show them to be all equally probable, but it indicates an element in each which makes it attractive to Christian thought. But the other question has scarcely been asked, or at least has not been debated, whether all three may not be construed as differing applications of one basal

principle, and whether the principle itself is not all we can be certain of.

The second consideration is that the same three opinions have appealed for support to the New Testament, and have all professed to find it. I do not say they are right, but the fact is unquestionable. What does it mean? It means that the policy of deciding between these divergent eschatologies simply by opening the New Testament will not serve. Apart from the fact that the authority of New Testament teaching is spiritual, not mediated by proof-texts or imposed on faith as if by statute, what we have to do with is a *prima facie* impression that isolated passages in Gospels or Epistles seem to favour each of the three views. As it has been put: "Reading these sets of passages with one theory already in mind, as most men do, we instinctively accommodate the remaining two to this one; we read it into them, and think that we find it there."<sup>1</sup> It is more than doubtful, for example, whether St. Paul believed in the annihilation of the impenitent; but it is plain some good exegetes think he did, and unless one's own exegesis is put forward as infallible, it is impossible to deny their view all plausibility. Hence the question cannot be solved by citing texts, and in point of fact this method has not solved it.

It may be rewarding to scrutinise in turn the distinct theories just mentioned; they all stand for live issues. We first turn to the doctrine of Universal Restitution.

If at this moment a frank and confidential plebiscite of the English-speaking ministry were taken, the likelihood is that a considerable majority would adhere to Universalism. They may no

<sup>1</sup> Illingworth, *Reason and Revelation*, 229.



doubt shrink from it as a dogma, but they would cherish it privately as at least a hope. How strong the desire is to believe in the salvation of all was recently shown by the sermon of a prominent English preacher—all whose sympathies are orthodox—on the loss of the *Titanic*, in which he expressed the confident belief that all the victims of that lamentable disaster would be saved, as having called on God in the hour of death. On the psychological tenability of his view we need say nothing. It certainly cannot be known that he is right, yet it is not impossible.

From early times there have not been lacking champions of Universalism against the more sombre doctrine which ranked as orthodox. The Greek love of harmony naturally turned to it. Alexandria was its home. Origen felt it should be taught esoterically, and that if proclaimed to all it might seduce some into a ruinous laxity.<sup>1</sup> But he was quite clear that the development of souls does not end with this life; there remains a purification of fallen spirits; all are led back to God, rising from plane to plane. "Stronger than all the evils in the soul," he writes, "is the Word, and the healing power that dwells in Him; and this healing He applies, according to the will of God, to every man. The consummation of all things is the destruction of evil."<sup>2</sup> Universalism was implicit in the logic of Origen's system<sup>3</sup>; it agreed with his conception of God, which wholly subordinated righteousness to love, with an interpretation of human freedom that left it to the

<sup>1</sup> c. *Cels.* VI. 26.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, VIII. 72.

<sup>3</sup> It was condemned by the Synod of Constantinople in 543. Origen had left open the possibility of future falls, for though an infinite number of æons has elapsed, an infinite number is to come.

end mutable and unfixed, and with a view of sin which reckons it weakness and darkness rather than definite forceful antagonism to God. The two Gregories and some members of the school of Antioch shared the belief of Origen. The West energetically disapproved it, and the pantheist Scotus Erigena buttressed it with arguments which can scarcely have helped it into favour. It received no countenance from Thomas Aquinas or the Reformers, though Anabaptist leaders preached it openly, but singularly enough was a favourite (if also secret) doctrine with some prominent Pietists of the eighteenth century, who believed they had Bengel on their side. A few of them claimed to have had confirmatory visions.

The theory in modern times owes its classic statement to Schleiermacher. He was a theological determinist of the purest strain, and the transition to Universalism is obviously simpler for a determinist than for any one else. If there is but one will in the universe, and this a will of almighty grace, it is very credible that at the long last "the love of God will triumph over the dying struggles of the human rebellion." Schleiermacher puts all the arguments in their most powerful and appealing form. We meet in his pages the familiar contentions to the effect that all men are predestined to salvation in Christ, and that the divine purpose cannot fail; that no creature can be possessed of absolute freedom; that sin in time can never merit an eternal punishment. But what is peculiar to him is the exquisite sympathy and force with which the psychological argument is stated.

If, as may be assumed, future punishment is spiritual in kind, and pertains to conscience, the lost must be regarded as actually better than they were on earth, when conscience gave them no

pain; and the pain of conscience which supervenes after death has thus raised them above the old self. But if they are better, it is unjust that they should suffer more. The living movement of remorse is a good which God will acknowledge. Turning now to the saved, he urges that sympathy with the lost must trouble their joy, all the more that its keenness is not mitigated, as it may be here, by a sense of hope. It may doubtless be argued that if there is such a thing as eternal ruin, it is essentially just, since none may gain the vision of God but those who share His righteousness. But this, far from quenching our sympathy, rather warms and intensifies it. The innocent sufferer is upheld to a wonderful degree by fellowship with God and the consciousness of his own integrity; whereas in the case supposed, one who is bearing the just reward of his deeds can have no such consolation. It is, moreover, impossible to conceive personal survival of death save as including memory of the past, a past in which some of the lost were linked by the closest ties to some of the redeemed; and when we look back and recall a time when we were as little regenerate as they, this also adds a profounder grief to our pity. Not only so, but the very dispensation of grace which brought life to us passed them by; and the bitter thought cannot be wholly silenced that we have positively gained by their loss, for the absolute interdependence of the varied factors of the divine plan obliges us to affirm a real connexion between the grant of life to some and the refusal of it to others.<sup>1</sup> He concludes that the difficulties of believing that any human soul will be condemned to endless woe are insurmountable, and such a doctrine ought not to be held or taught

<sup>1</sup> It is at this point that Schleiermacher's argument is most distinctively his own.

publicly without statements from Christ's own lips much more decisive than any we actually have. The difference between souls is one rather of earlier and later reception into the kingdom of Christ—a distinction inseparable from the idea of a world developing in time.<sup>1</sup>

An effort has been made to place upon Schleiermacher's general argument, and specially on the place he gives to sympathy, the brand of sentimentalism. But he does not seem to go much beyond the passionate cry of St. Paul: "I could wish that I myself were anathema from Christ for my brethren's sake."

Even convinced adherents of Universalism own that at best the support of the New Testament is dubious. The Gospels contain words which, at least on a first inspection, seem clearly to assert the eternity of punishment, to which an offset has been found in problematic allusions to forgiveness after death, the omnipotence of divine love, and the absolute triumph predicted for the Kingdom. There is a tendency to press isolated words in parables, or sayings of Jesus relating primarily to other themes. The particularly unyielding character of the Synoptic record has been explained by saying that the Gospel sources represent a time when the apostles had only partially escaped from the prejudices of Judaism; it was long before they apprehended the real mind of Jesus, who in terms had accommodated His teaching to their inherited beliefs. Or it has been maintained that

<sup>1</sup> In Germany, so far as I know, Universalism has been definitely argued for by no prominent writer on Dogmatic since Schweizer, the leading exponent of Schleiermacher's principles. This is remarkable, for the hold of Universalism on the general mind is probably greater than ever, and has quite certainly grown within the past generation. On the other hand, Conditionalism is favoured by a large proportion of recent German theologians.

what the New Testament offers, as in the case of the Trinity, is but seeds and beginnings of doctrine to be evolved later; it being forgotten that no real parallel exists, since the purely revelational conception of the Trinity is nowhere implicitly negated, as dogmatic Universalism quite definitely is in the words: "These shall go away into eternal punishment" (Matt. xxv. 46). But at least in the Epistles, it is thought, a different prospect is opened up, and it is upon Pauline texts, almost exclusively, that the Universalist case has rested.

Much importance has been attached to 1 Cor. xv. 28, where the ultimate state of perfected redemption is indicated by the words, "that God may be all in all," with apparently an implied prophecy that all men, without exception, will at last share in the divine life. It obviously is a crucial point whether this is a legitimate deduction from the quoted phrase. Other verses are: "As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive"; "Through one act of righteousness the free gift came unto all men to justification of life"; "God hath shut up all unto disobedience, that He might have mercy upon all"; "That in the name of Jesus every knee should bow" (1 Cor. xv. 22; Rom. v. 18, xi. 32; Phil. ii. 10). With these is taken the saying reported in the Fourth Gospel: "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself" (xii. 32). It must be allowed that the primary significance of these verses appears to be as much in favour of Universalism as various sayings in the Gospels are against it, and that if they stood alone in St. Paul's teaching they would leave no reasonable doubt as to his mind. It is not surprising that they have been interpreted as containing so ample a view of the divine purpose as to involve the final recovery of all men. But when we look

closely at their context and meaning, three facts emerge.

In the first place, a more accurate exegesis proves some of them to be irrelevant. Thus 1 Cor. xv. 22 means simply that as all united to Adam by physical ties suffer death, so all united to Christ by spiritual ties shall be made alive, and Rom. v. 18 means the same thing. Those who do not belong to Christ are not in view. Again, Rom. xi. 32 is undoubtedly a great affirmation of the universality of God's will to save—to save all, whether Jews or Gentiles; but since redemption for St. Paul is conditioned by faith, it throws no light on the question how far that saving will is to be accomplished and whether all men will yield to the divine love. So far as language goes, the phrase “that God may be all in all” is satisfied by the doctrine of the annihilation of the wicked. Equally with Universalism, it teaches that in the end no existent human life will remain unpenetrated by the divine powers. Secondly, in certain Pauline utterances there is no ambiguity at all. Verses like these cannot really be evaded: “If our gospel is veiled, it is veiled in them that are perishing”; “Who shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord” (2 Cor. iv. 3; 2 Thess. i. 9). In such passages we seem to hear an echo of Jesus' parables of the Wheat and the Tares, the Wise and Foolish Virgins, the Marriage Feast and the man without a wedding garment. One has only to scan a list of terms used by St. Paul to describe the fate of the unbelieving to have all doubt as to his view removed.<sup>1</sup> Thirdly, it is incredible that if a lover of his race so unwearied in service as the apostle had cherished a conviction of the ultimate

<sup>1</sup> See Kennedy, *St. Paul's Conceptions of the Last Things*, 313.



redemption of all, he should nowhere have allowed a hint of it to escape him, or should have indulged freely in statements of a diametrically opposite tenor. These statements, it may be noted, occur not merely in early writings, whose point of view St. Paul might later have transcended, but in the very letters which are thought to yield proof of his Universalism. It is a fundamental principle of interpretation that passages which superficially admit of different constructions ought to be read in the light of others which are unequivocally clear. And in the present instance we cannot break the rule without making St. Paul responsible for self-contradiction of the grossest kind.

It must also be held that various attempts—as by Oetinger and Maurice—to evacuate the word “eternal” of its natural sense have come to nothing. As is well known, it has been urged that “eternal” or “æonian” is not without end, but such that the end is hidden or inconceivable by us; that it is best translated by words like supra-temporal, transcendent, perfect; that at most it means lasting for an age or ages, not strictly everlasting. It has naturally been pointed out in reply that “æonian” is the epithet uniformly attached to “life” or “salvation,” where on every ground a limited sense is impossible. How apostolic writers could have expressed the eternity of bliss and woe otherwise than by terms they have actually used, it is impossible to conceive. Even if this particular word can be forced into meaning less than it appears to say, and the endlessness of destruction for St. Paul left an open question, it is beyond the power of interpretation to extrude from it the notion of *finality*. Let the temporal or arithmetical aspect be cancelled, still we are faced by that of moral quality. And if this implies any time character at all, it



is necessarily one that "fills the mind and imagination to the furthest horizon and beyond it," leaving no ulterior prospect.

It is strictly true, then, to say that Bible proof of Universalism cannot be found. At most it may be contended that beside passages which conceive the punishment as everlasting others are not wanting which appear to be in harmony with the theory of Conditional Immortality.

The Universalist view, as we have seen, is probably much more widespread to-day than ever before; and as long as it continues to be held as a private opinion, a wish or hope or hypothesis which brings relief to the feelings and excludes other intolerably painful views, no one surely can desire to quarrel with it. It points in a direction wistfully scanned by all. So long as men believe in God and love their fellows they will find it hard to conceive the ultimate failure of the divine mercy to win any whom it seeks, or the complete atrophy in man of the capacity to be God's child. Surveying human life and its conditions, they will be apt to reason that "if freedom has issued in the practical universality of sin, we may at least hope that it will issue, through the divine grace, in the universality of salvation."<sup>1</sup> Hope set in this key is a natural infringement of the nearly complete agnosticism with respect to the lot of the impenitent which, as I urged at the outset of this chapter, is ordained for faith. But its place has been often taken by a confident dogmatism. The position has been set forth that Universalism is known to be true, and that accordingly it can claim to rank as part of the Gospel which men have a right to hear. This position must be examined briefly.

<sup>1</sup> Wheeler Robinson, *Christian Doctrine of Man*, 338.

And first, let us put aside one or two counter-arguments as unsound. Thus it is incorrect to say that even unquestioning acceptance of Universal Restitution must weaken a man's zeal for the Christian propaganda. Very probably it has done so in certain cases, as extremer forms of Calvinism did. But we need only recall names like Erskine of Linlathen, Crossley of Manchester, Blumhardt in Germany—all convinced Universalists but also active promoters of evangelism—to feel that as a whole the charge is sweeping and unjust. These men, if we are to credit their own story, felt a deeper zest in service due to the new hope. The other charge, that Universalism favours moral laxity, goes a step farther, and would be formidable if proved, but it is only fair to point out that no Christian teacher has ever denied that impenitent sin will be punished hereafter. On the contrary, Universalists have earnestly proclaimed a penalty which is sure and awful. What they decline to hold is that in the strict or unqualified sense it will be everlasting.

On the other hand, dogmatic Universalism may justly be called a departure from Christian ground, as Christianity is defined in the New Testament. The apostles are clear as to what redemption is. They are clear as to the terms—terms divinely wide and gracious—on which the sinful are pardoned, united to God, filled with that Spirit which is a pledge of eternal life. Apart from this, they have no conception at all of what it means to be redeemed. And when schemes are drawn up whereby all men eventually *must* be swept into the divine Kingdom, they appear to have lost touch with the moral realities of New Testament religion. It is in this sense that to proclaim Universalism as a certainty is rightly repelled as disloyal to the Gospel, for nothing will permanently

commend itself to the believing mind which tends, as such a dogma must, to lower the ethical significance of the present life. The preacher has failed who leaves a moral impression at war with that which Jesus left; and Universalism, taken as a message for the world, is at war with Jesus' teaching about the future. The suggestion that He may have educated us beyond Himself, enabling us to take wider views, is hardly worth discussion. To call it improbable or unconvincing is a weak expression. Whatever our instinctive wishes, we may well shrink from supposing that we have attained to worthier or more ample conceptions of the divine love, its length and depth and height, than were attained by Jesus.

No one can miss the fact, plainly visible in history, that the advocates of Universalism have mostly been unwilling to announce it publicly. This was the attitude of Origen, of Bengel, of Zinzendorf. In other words, it did not impress them as part of the Gospel; for one cannot even imagine any part of the Gospel—enforcing itself as such because it is vitally implied in the believing experience of Christ—which it is not at once a duty to proclaim and a boon to hear. But to be told that the salvation of all is certain cannot make men more willing to be reconciled to God. It does not help them to believe that this is the accepted time, for it puts the urgency of grace into the future at the cost of the present. On the other hand, the whole conception of reserved or esoteric doctrine is alien to Christianity. Inevitably it leads to the notion of a double truth, a public and a private truth, of course with the understanding that only the private one is true.

Again, it is not unfair to point out that Universalism as a dogma has tended to argue the question on a sub-moral plane. It has too much operated

with a divine love which in reality is a *thing*, a nature force comparable to magnetic attraction, and advancing to its goal with overwhelming and previsible certainty. Whatever be the analogies employed—physical or chemical as in the old rationalism, biological since the application of Darwinian theory to religion—it must be objected that they reach a solution of the problem by eliminating one aspect of the facts. It is not that they have the love of God on their side, while their opponents have His holiness. The very point is that love which forces its way is not the love revealed in Jesus. Human freedom, on this view, is something destined to be swallowed up in grace; it is lost, not found, in the redeeming activity of God; the two are rivals, one of which must go under, while the other triumphs by the abolition of its opposite.<sup>1</sup> But do we know enough to say a man may not wrap himself in a defiance that renders him inaccessible to the motives of the Gospel? I do not say it is so; but to maintain categorically that a time *must* come when the human soul will yield to moral suasion it has resisted throughout life is to exhibit a very deficient sense of our ignorance. Observation, as far as it is a guide, justifies no such assurance. We meet with bad men in whom good still lingers, and who give us a clear impression that repentance never is impossible; we also meet bad men, who have tasted deeply of sin, its impotence and failure and misery, yet have not been softened but only confirmed in evil. Grant that educative divine influences persist on the farther side of death, laden with infinite mercy; grant that hearts may

<sup>1</sup> But it is worth pointing out that the reality of freedom is equally denied by the dogmatic assertion of the opposite view, that men cannot change after death; which may be thought another reason for agnosticism.

be changed there and wills blended with the will of God; still, the very reasons for admitting the possibility of this are also reasons for owning that change may be resisted, and that permanently. If it be felt that this is to limit omnipotence, it must be replied that not all conceptions of omnipotence are Christian, and that some real limits are involved in the creation of man. We must not make salvation a nature-process, embracing God and man in a necessary drift of change.

No argument counts for more, I imagine, than that which puts Universalism forward as the only view by which the government and Fatherhood of God is relieved from partial frustration. Short of a redemption leaving no one out, it is said, the divine purpose fails. But this really is to gain an unprovable conclusion by turning it into an axiom. If it is compatible with holy love to create a race into which sin may find entrance because its members possess a nature constituted in self-determination, it may also be right that personality should never be invaded at any stage. It may be no more true to say that God fails because He cannot force men to trust Him than to say so because He cannot alter the laws of number.<sup>1</sup> In any case the great problem would

<sup>1</sup> Here is how a philosopher deals with the point. In his *Pragmatism* (pp. 290-295) the late Professor James supposes the world's author to give us the option of taking part in a world not certain to be saved, "a world the perfection of which shall be conditional merely, the condition being that each several agent does its own 'level best.'" And he asks: "Should you in all seriousness, if participation in such a world were proposed to you, feel bound to reject it as not safe enough? Would you say that, rather than be part and parcel of so fundamentally pluralistic and irrational a universe, you preferred to relapse into the slumber of nonentity from which you had been momentarily aroused by the tempter's voice? Of course, if you are normally constituted, you would do

be, not that evil had no end, but that it had a beginning. We need to remind ourselves once more that the Christian hope can appeal to no other source, guarantee or criterion of truth than the experience of redemption which has been evoked by the Gospel. This experience, as a present fact, is in no way affected, much less undermined, by any uncertainty or ignorance on other subjects to which we have to resign ourselves. We have no right to measure the infinitude of divine love by the hidden possibilities of the future, or to condition it in any sense whatever by what may yet transpire with respect to men not now in Christ. We believe in the endless love of God, for it has touched and saved us in His Son. We can be certain of this, now and here; it is a fact of knowledge which no doubt as to something else can in the least impair. Otherwise hope would wrongly be made the basis of faith, instead of its fruit and unfolding.

Thus we return to the note struck at the outset, a note of nearly complete agnosticism. Sin, while any sin remains, entails suffering and exclusion, for we worship One with whom evil cannot dwell.

nothing of the sort. There is a healthy-minded buoyancy in most of us which such a universe would exactly fit. The world proposed would seem 'rational' to us in the most living way." Later on he puts a series of questions: "May not the claims of tender-mindedness go too far? May not religious optimism be too idyllic? Must *all* be saved? Is no price to be paid in the work of salvation? Is the last word sweet? Is all 'yes, yes' in the universe? Doesn't the fact of 'no' stand at the very core of life? Doesn't the very 'seriousness' that we attribute to life mean that ineluctable noes and losses form a part of it?"

Of course, what really matters here is whether the choice proposed and the questions asked are respectively proposed and asked in view of the authentically Christian idea of God, as the Father of spirits.

Whether it will or will not remain for ever, we cannot know; nor is there reason to think that on earth we shall ever know. No one certainly is in a position to affirm that there must be those who eternally remain unsaved. This would be much more than to admit the possibility of eternal sin; it would plant intrinsic moral dualism at the heart of things.



## CHAPTER VIII

### CONDITIONAL IMMORTALITY

THE theory of Conditional Immortality has from early times been recommended to the Church as a *via media* between Universalism and the ecclesiastical doctrine of Eternal Punishment. Briefly, the theory is this. By nature man is not immortal, but the gift of eternal life is conferred in regeneration; and although the unregenerate may possess a life which does not perish with the body, it has no root in God, and must cease to be, those who impenitently defy the divine love being destined to final annihilation. It has been stated with great religious power by the late Dr. Dale, who adopted it after long hesitancy. Speaking in his own name and that of others who concurred in his opinion, he said: "We have reached the conclusion that eternal life is the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ, that this life is not given to those who reject the Gospel, but is given in the new birth to those who believe and who are thereby made partakers of the divine nature. We warn men that while they continue in impenitence, they fail to secure it; and if they continue impenitent to the end, they are destined to indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish. . . . While it is possible to separate a man from his sin, God's love clings to the man, while God's anger lies on the sin; but when this becomes impossible and the man and

the sin are *one*, then there is nothing left but for the evil to be consumed by the fires of the divine wrath. The final expression of God's abhorrence of sin will be the moral flame in which those who cannot be separated from their sin will be consumed." <sup>1</sup> This has been described by an antagonist as "the most wretched and cowardly of all theories"; but even those who reject it will feel that theology at all events ought to be spared language better suited to the violence of political controversy.

When, however, we turn to Scripture, which defenders of Conditionalism usually claim to have on their side, it becomes plain that the difficulties before them are immense. They are bound to demonstrate a series of positions which, taken separately, and still more taken all together, have at least the look of being nearly hopeless. For it has to be proved that by "life" the Bible means just "existence" and by "death" just "non-existence," or, as it has been expressed, "the breaking-up of the human *monad*." It has to be proved that when Scripture speaks of the wicked as suffering "destruction" or "perdition," these terms ought to be construed with the barest literalism, and that verses in which this is out of the question are negligible exceptions. On the other hand, it has to be shown that Bible expressions affirming the eternity of punishment are *not* to be taken literally, and do not mean what they say. In addition, good reasons must be given for holding that the teaching of Scripture on the subject was meant to overturn the universal belief in the immortality of all, which undoubtedly prevailed at the time and in the circles in which that teaching was promulgated. All this constitutes an exacting task.

<sup>1</sup> *Life*, 312, 313.

Indeed, the conclusion can hardly be avoided that the Biblical part of the Conditionalist argument is by all odds the least impressive, and that that argument would in fact be strengthened if its claim to rest on Scripture were quietly allowed to drop.

Nothing certainly is so evident as that in the Bible "life" means a spiritual state (with its "physical" counterpart, of course) marked by intensive quality, and deriving this quality from the relationship in which the living person is conceived as standing to the living God. "Life" is used frequently as the equivalent of "eternal life"; that is, it connotes blessedness, activity and vigour of which the believer is participant in virtue of his unity with God through Christ. This fixes the meaning of its opposite, "death." Death is the absence of all that forms the specific content of life. It is the withdrawal of everything that imparts value to life for the religious mind. Contact with God is lost, and with it all that is wrapped up in the word "blessedness." No terms of description are too vivid or powerful to point its misery and ruin. It is destruction, perishing, the last calamity. Naturally, this state can only be indicated by a Christian apostle in words of a predominantly negative cast. He must speak of it as the antithesis of salvation. But the definite loss of consciousness is nowhere associated with it. As Prof. A. B. Davidson has said of the writers of the Old Testament: "For all that appears, the idea that any human person should become extinct or be annihilated never occurred to them."<sup>1</sup> In their view, to survive apart from God is to abide in death. Because death is "abiding," and not non-existence, New Testament

<sup>1</sup> *Expositor*, V. i. p. 333 (quoted by Kennedy, *St. Paul's Conceptions of the Last Things*, 125).

writers can speak of men having passed "from death unto life," and can ascribe "tribulation and anguish" to the life of the lost in a world to come. In short, to render life and death by existence and non-existence is to represent the Bible mind as fixing its chief interest not in spiritual realities but in a bare and hard ontology. Death is to be undone, to be in ruin, to miss everything that can be called well-being; but it is not to vanish in extinction. Thus one of the main pleas of Annihilationism, that to call death what is a kind of suffering life is absurd, will not bear scrutiny for a moment in the light of Bible teaching. Even common speech refutes it. We speak of a dead tree, or dead flesh, because these things have parted with all that constituted their value or charm; but they have not ceased to be. What has happened is a rupture of the tie linking them to life.

After all, the New Testament was written by men who had been bred upon the Old; and the Old Testament idea of Sheol, albeit with radical defects, had contained at least the idea of survival. With modifications, it reappears in the parable of Dives and Lazarus. In the New Testament, then, the dead really live; but they live otherwise than on earth. There is no lapse into nothingness.

Conditionalists, as is well known, have sought to meet the force of what seem unequivocal New Testament expressions, predicating death as a state of personal being, by attributing to them a special turn of meaning. When such texts as these are cited: "Let the dead bury their dead"; "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead"; "When the commandment came, sin revived, and I died" (Luke ix. 60; Eph. v. 14; Rom. vii. 9)—all passages which seem to convey the sense of a distinct and fatal break

with God—it is replied that here the meaning of death is proleptic. No one need deny that in usage of this sort there is an element of prolepsis. When the woman who lives in pleasure is said to be “dead while she liveth,” it is certainly implied anticipatively that if she continues in her ways the end will be an irrevocable passing out of touch with God, through what we call physical death. But this does not permit us either to resolve the whole content of the word “dead” into anticipated experience, or to define what is anticipated as extinction. For one thing, the godless quality of life which entails impending doom is actual now. It is as real as it will ever be, and is contained within the significance of “death.” Further, in St. Paul’s deep word: “Sin revived, and I died,” the aorist (*ἀπέθανον*) clearly points to a past event. An experience recorded in language filled with emotion so intense cannot have been one merely of anticipation. It occurred then and there; its meaning was within itself. It was such as to force the cry: “Who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?” Nothing which is construed purely as a future contingency could excite feeling so keen and actual.

It is perhaps unnecessary to labour the point that various New Testament phrases, which speak of “eternal punishment” or “an eternal sin,” or of a state on which the wrath of God abides, not merely do not bear witness to Conditionalism, but are irreconcilably opposed to it.

There is one fact, however, which may, even if it be unconsciously, have aided the rise and progress of the Conditionalist theory. This is the circumstance that in some of his most characteristic forms of statement St. Paul appears to expect only a resurrection of the just. For him, the Spirit in believers is the earnest of their rising, as

it was in virtue of the Spirit of holiness that Christ was installed, by resurrection, as the Son of God with power (Rom. i. 4). "*In Christ* shall all be made alive." That is to say, the ideas "life" and "salvation" interpret each other. But we have no right to draw the inference that those who do not rise are doomed to annihilation. They abide in death—in that dark condition of ruin which St. Paul names *ἀπωλεία*. No prospect opens to them of resurrection unto life.<sup>1</sup>

This is not the place for a discussion of theories of Greek or Indian philosophy, in which the annihilation of the soul after death was taught, irrespectively of its goodness or badness. But within Church history proper there is something like consent that Arnobius, at the beginning of the fourth century, was the first to teach Conditionalism on explicitly Christian grounds. In his judgment, the soul was too full of defects to be a divine creation, and it is not immortal *per se*; endless being is the exclusive privilege of the followers of Christ, unbelievers and heathen ultimately going out in nothingness. The next

<sup>1</sup> Similarly, one strain of teaching in the Fourth Gospel bears that only the righteous shall have part in the resurrection. Thus in v. 25 it is said: "The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live"; cf. vi. 54: "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh My blood hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." On the other hand, certain passages appear to carry on an older and more primitive belief to the effect that resurrection is universal, as when immediately after the first verse just cited it is said: "All that are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth" (v. 29). It has been asserted, but not proved, that this second kind of passage is due to interpolation. But it is only confusion of thought to say that even the first kind points to a doctrine of Conditional Immortality.

important name is later by centuries—Faustus Socinus (1539–1604). In addition to arguments now very familiar, he urged that if Christ and His apostles seem to speak as if the soul were naturally immortal, this is but didactic accommodation to primitive ideas. On the last page of the *Ethics*, Spinoza pretty definitely takes up the annihilationist position. “The ignorant man,” he writes, “is not only distracted in various ways by external causes without ever gaining the true acquiescence of his spirit, but, moreover, lives as it were unwitting of himself, and of God, and of things, and as soon as he ceases to suffer, ceases also to be. Whereas the wise man, in so far as he is regarded as such, is scarcely at all disturbed in spirit, but, being conscious of himself, and of things, by a certain eternal necessity never ceases to be.” The voice is the voice of metaphysics, not of faith; but in the nineteenth century Conditionalism came into favour with many Christian writers, and no small impression was made. In England it was earnestly expounded by Mr. Edward White, in his well-known book *Life in Christ* (1875), and among those who shared his views were Archbishop Whately, Prebendary Row, and Mr. J. B. Heard; in France it gained the support of Petavel-Olliff, Janet, Renouvier, Secrétan, and Bruston; in Germany of Rothe, Schultz, and several of the more noted recent dogmaticians. Some of these last, unwilling to affirm the theory outright, have pointed to it as an alternative well worth considering: so Ritschl, Wendt, Kirn and Haering, and in a few passages Troeltsch also has made an approach to it. It has occasionally been argued that natural immortality, so far from being an original element of the Christian message, was a speculation of Platonism gradually invading the Church.



Conditionalism has undoubtedly gained by its praiseworthy desire to concentrate interest on the positive core of faith. Immortal life, as believers hope for it, is life in Christ. That sufficiently explains the occurrence in the New Testament of phrases like "worthy of the resurrection," "children of the resurrection," "if by any means I might attain to the resurrection of the dead." Apostolic faith, absorbed in the hope certified by Christ, finds promise of "life" in Him alone. We look for an experience wholly controlled and imbued by Him. To remain for ever what we are would be intolerable; but in our empirical selves there is nothing that could qualify us as inhabitants of the higher order where He reigns; we can reach it only through grace. The specific kind of immortality of which Spirit-possessed life is an earnest—*this* is dependent on a certain attitude to God, and our sense of it wavers with the intensity of our religious life. Hence immortality, *in the characteristically Christian meaning of the word*, may be truly described as conditional. No one can have it who is not united to Jesus by faith.

And this means that Conditionalism has done a genuine service by unrelenting antagonism to the idea of natural immortality in its traditional form. In the career of a being like man nothing can be "natural" in the sense of a nature-process. There can be no part of experience which arrives simply of itself, and colour is lent to that erroneous idea only because we viciously abstract this or that physical event, such as decay or death, from personal life as a whole. Immortality in this automatic sense we should all deny; it could only be asserted, I fancy, by the eminent modern philosopher who was heard to say that he now felt he could *prove* the immortality of the soul, if only

the non-existence of God were granted. But if the soul of man is immortal, as the New Testament writers assume, it is because of the divine character, not because the soul has certain ontological qualities which make persistence a necessity. And those who believe all men shall live for ever do believe this, not in view of the empirical constitution of human nature or as a consequence of its evolutionary ascent, but in view of God, to whom man has essential relations.

Further, dislike is now generally felt for one or two arguments with which Conditionalism used to be fought. The theory has been held responsible, for instance, for a decline of missionary zeal in its adherents. As long as people were convinced that the heathen, if unconverted, were doomed to an eternity of woe, so long, it was said, the churches had an overwhelming motive to appeal to. But this motive must be weakened or altogether extinguished if the new doctrine is permitted to mitigate the darkness of the future, and to promise extinction rather than conscious pain. But the point is ill taken. In fact, as every one knows, it was just in the centuries of post-Reformation orthodoxy, when people were surest of the terrible fate awaiting heathendom, that least was done for the missionary cause. Besides, how many of our best missionaries are actually moved by the desire to save men from endless pain? The supreme sanction of missions is our Lord's command and the passionate desire to tell those who have not heard it that with God there is plenteous redemption. We dare not say that since we have become less sure than formerly that all who die without faith will perish miserably, we no longer feel constrained to obey the will of Christ. Nothing in our view of the world to come could ever modify the duty of imparting to those outside

the faith our knowledge of the love of God, of striving to lighten their sense of guilt or to solace their sorrow and their fear.

Again, nothing but ignorance of the varied forms assumed by Conditionalism can have prompted the charge that, as a doctrine, it abolishes future penalty for sin. Among its advocates, few or none have contended for the instant annihilation of the wicked at death. Doubtless we may ask: If man is not universally immortal, why should the sinful survive death at all? but this question, however apposite or damaging, leaves unaltered the fact that Conditionalists do almost invariably teach the survival of the wicked and the imposition of punishment after death.<sup>1</sup> They urge that punishment will take another form than tradition has supposed; but to say that God cannot tolerate to all eternity a dead limb in a redeemed universe is undeniably to assert future punishment of the direst kind. Adherents of Conditionalism, that is, reject the popular view that sin is its own sufficient penalty. They believe that a universe ruled by God must react upon the sinner, but they see no reason to suppose that this punitive reaction must necessarily take place during earthly life. To some minds, indeed, the charge that penalty has been abolished will seem the exact opposite of the truth, since to them the prospect of annihilation, after whatever lapse of time, would seem an even more terrible form of retribution than endless torture.

Nevertheless the case against Conditionalism is so strong as to veto its acceptance. Whatever may be said of isolated phrases, the general drift of Bible teaching is really such as to leave no

<sup>1</sup> Later we shall see that this is rather a weakness than a strength, but at present I am concerned solely with facts.

option. It is simple historical accuracy to say that the New Testament writers assumed the immortality of the soul; for them the existence of the soul after death, in bliss or woe, was unending. Some of the most recent exponents of Conditionalism virtually grant this by abandoning silently the effort to make out Scripture proof. By doing so they get rid of an embarrassment: on the other hand, it is a grave disadvantage to any theory to have against it the religious conviction of Scripture as a whole. Inspiration apart, an idea totally foreign to the mind of the New Testament is much more likely to be wrong than right; just as a proposed new canon of poetic art which could be put in no intelligible relation to the work of Aeschylus, Virgil and Shakespeare must have against it the secure judgment of mankind.

Again, the Conditionalist argument has appealed, not without success, to an age preoccupied with biology. It seems to go easily into biological terms and may be regarded as carrying out the idea of "the survival of the fittest" into its ultimate form. In the worlds of nature and spirit equally, we are told, many lives come to nothing, and their failure can be traced to a lack of correspondence with environment. God is the environment of the soul, and the soul's inability to adjust itself to Him before the great crisis of death means that by natural law it passes out of being. Christians respond to the conditions of spiritual existence; they develop the faculty of being immortal; the incorrigible show no similar plasticity and duly cease to exist. Immortality, in short, is an acquired characteristic.<sup>1</sup> Now in

<sup>1</sup> Many of the difficulties here rival those of ultra-Calvinism, and are of the same kind. If God foresaw that certain souls would one day be cast forth as refuse, why, it will be asked, were they created? Many advocates

matters transcendent, or of extreme complexity, a wise man will hold that the facility, completeness and rationality of a solution is a sure sign of its narrowness and shallowness. The argument just outlined will appear impressive only to those who ignore the distinction between things and persons. If man is a person, conscious, moral and responsible, then his relation to God is an essential relation, not fortuitous, and while it may wholly fail to become what it ought to be, it persists with the persistence of man himself. His freedom asks for nothing less than the infinite potentialities of eternity; character, in the worst man alive, has in it a spiritual force for which unending activities are not too great a field. There is no escaping the dilemma—either man is made for immortality: he is moral by constitution, and therefore intrinsically a member, good or bad, of the abiding moral world which has God for its abiding centre. Or he is not made for immortality: change and decay are his native sphere; apart from Christ he is, in point of fact, as finite as the beasts. He is an intelligent animal who *may become* a child of God: but, taking him as he is, in his unregenerate condition, there is no

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of Conditional Immortality have argued, in regard to these human failures, that "their true function is to be found in their ministry to the more advanced." But this simply will not do. If Jesus was right, the principle that persons are to be treated only as ends, never merely as means, is much more than a law of moral conduct; it is a principle on which God deals with His human children.

As regards the biological argument, it should be noted that the theory of selection indicates merely the persistence of certain *types*, better fitted to survive in a particular environment. It has no bearing on individuals. The individual members of the successful type perish equally with those of the unsuccessful type. Hence the analogy is an irrelevance when we are discussing the immortality of persons.

appreciable sense in which he *is* God's child. The Father's relation to him is accidental, and may lapse.<sup>1</sup>

But a view which thus intrudes the notion of caste into the human family puts the sense of brotherhood in danger. I should imagine that the man who adopts the Conditionalist position with serious conviction, regarding it as no longer a hypothesis but an indubitable certainty, must find it hard to maintain his sense of the greatness of the soul—not this soul or that, but all souls. He can never be sure whether the individual before him is or is not so great that he will live for ever. Could the truth be known, his importance might suddenly undergo an inglorious diminution, for it might turn out that extinction, not immortality, was his destiny. Belief in annihilation, therefore, can only be tolerable to a lover of his race if the very thought of its particular application is kept away. In evangelism, at all events, we must operate with some other view. We must speak to every man with the eager, glad assumption that he is as immortal as we are, and that even to admit the possibility of a secret difference between him and ourselves would be to give way to unpardonable pride. Nothing else is in line with Christ's estimate of the incalculable worth of each life.

The distinction between souls mortal and immortal—in mankind, that is, as it actually exists at any given moment—has been buttressed by reference to another distinction, that between types

<sup>1</sup> It must be observed that the assertions of Conditionalism are categorical assertions; it is sure that the unregenerate cannot possibly survive. The point is one at which, dissatisfied with agnosticism, it insists on fixing what can and what cannot be. This dogmatism is a grave objection, for no one can *prove* that man may not be immortal in virtue of the relationship to God which constitutes him man.



of character. Character in a bad man, it is held, is obviously subject to a process of wasting, and in common speech this is indicated by words like "dissipated" or "dissolute." The bad man goes to pieces; his moral being is gradually disintegrated, and the ideal limit in such a case is complete extermination. But to this it is surely a valid answer that character and personality or selfhood are not the same. Even in regard to character itself the above-mentioned physical metaphor must be applied with caution. We really mean by it that a man's moral nature is degenerating; we do not mean that he is coming to have no character at all. He has imparted a certain moral quality to the capacities for good or evil with which he entered the world, and this quality is increasingly bad. Yet a bad man suffers no reduction of the faculties to think, feel or will. His faculties, it is true, are more and more misdirected; but evil as he is, he may be clever, passionate and wilful. Selfhood or personality remains. The bad will may, by a violent figure, be said to abrogate or extinguish itself, in the sense that its search for self-satisfaction is inevitably stultified and defeated: but we can set no bounds to the intense persistence of hate or enmity. The opposite can only be maintained on what is really a deistic view of life. God will then be a spectator, looking on impotently or at least inactively, while souls at last withdraw themselves, by self-dissolution in nothingness, at once from the scope of His retribution and the appeal of His love.

In addition, it has been felt that Conditionalism gives no help with the problem of half the human race. Men are immortal who have laid hold of Christ; what, then, of those to whom He is quite unknown? If it be said they will be judged by



their aspirations after good, is not the number of those who lack all aspiration very limited, outside Christendom as within? Does a heathen who is not without virtue lose his immortality simply because he has heard of Christ but at the moment of death has not received Him? How far must contact with the Christian message go to destroy a man's chance of living beyond the grave?

In truth, the effect of Christ's mission, according to this theory, is so strange and full of paradox as to be almost unintelligible. "Had I not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin," says Jesus in the Fourth Gospel; and the suggested principle is apparently of wider sweep than we had known. It cannot be doubted that when the Christian era opened the great majority of men held to the immortality of the soul, but, if the Conditionalist view be sound, we shall have to make room for the supposition that one result of the proclamation of the Gospel—and necessarily a designed result—has been to extinguish this belief in many minds, or at least that this *ought* to be the result. If the Conditionalist theory be accepted by a non-Christian, it convinces him that he, at all events, will not live for ever. So that, on these terms, one aspect of Christ's work was to bring *mortality* to light. Wherever the theory prevails, the instinctive belief of men in an unending future life for all has been dispelled, and it was part of Jesus' achievement to dispel it. We may reasonably put this aside as too paradoxical for truth.

These difficulties are seriously increased by the further discovery that according to nearly all Conditionalist writers the wicked shall rise from the grave for punishment of an indefinite duration. That is to say, they *are* capable of survival though they have not faith. Immortality is no real con-

stituent of their nature, yet, since righteousness demands it, they do live after death. Which means that Conditionalism, as a French writer points out, has all the inconveniences and none of the advantages of a compromise. The logic of the theory—and logic is its strength—insists that unbelievers perish at death, that spiritual coincides with physical extinction; and this, though savouring of materialism, is at least consistent. But the consistency is too much for Christian feeling; hence, while the immortality of all is denied, the survival of all is emphatically affirmed. The impenitent do not rise *quâ* men, for man as man is perishable; they do not rise *quâ* believers, for they are not such; they rise, therefore, by the act of divine omnipotence, in order to receive the due reward of their deeds. This is put forward in the name of justice; but it carries with it the undesirable result that all who die in sin, be their degree of guilt what it may, are overwhelmed at last in a common and equal doom.

Most people will feel the purely religious objections to be even stronger. This suggestion that souls live again, but only for a season; this notion “of a soul immortal enough to live through death, but not immortal to live on for ever”; this picture of human beings who are temporarily resuscitated in order to endure a penalty which is retributive and no more, and then are dropped back into nullity—such thoughts appear too incongruous with the Fatherhood of God made known in Jesus. Our minds cannot rest in a view that involves, as even the doctrine of eternal punishment does not, a final and complete breaking-off of all moral relations between the soul and God. We need not raise the question of what God can or cannot do. We need not inquire whether it is in His power to

destroy souls, in the bare literal sense of that sad word. It is enough that we may not ask men to look forward to an act of divine despair.

So far one can see with moral clarity; the rest is darkness. On the general question whether the penalty of "sin without excuse and without change" will be unending, we must take an attitude of complete agnosticism. We are impelled, on the one hand, to assert the inexorable reality of divine judgment; by an equal force we are drawn to proclaim the infinitude and eternity of the divine love. It is well to turn the solemn side of this twofold possibility towards ourselves; not less well to present its aspect of grace and hope to the mourner and the weak-hearted. I do not myself feel that teaching in harmony with the spirit of the New Testament will insist on more than this, that something morally dread and dire, not to be bodied forth in earthly speech, awaits those who deliberately reject the Lord Jesus Christ. If we wish to keep the true perspective of faith, we shall fill our minds, as we gaze forward, not with the lot of the faithless, but with the destiny of all who have believed in God.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE LIFE EVERLASTING

WE have seen that with regard to those who die in hostility to God a nearly complete agnosticism is imposed upon us by the very nature of Christian faith. It does not at all follow, however, that we are condemned to a like nescience about the experience, after death, of the redeemed. Indeed, the circumstance that the believer is sure of the *fact* of a blessed immortality is plainly against total nescience, since, as in the case of the Theistic problem, reality and content are only partially capable of abstraction from each other; we cannot know *that* a thing is without in some sense knowing *what* it is. We are led to ask, therefore, how far it is possible to say what "heaven" will be like, at least in faint outline. Can we fix the main characteristics of that life beyond the grave?

To raise this question is in no sense an attempt to break down the reserve of Scripture. It is assumed that we know only in part, and see darkly, as in a glass. A medieval legend tells of two monks who had debated much regarding the nature of the heavenly life, one contending that it must be *taliter*, or similar to earth, the other conceiving it as *aliter*, otherwise than here below. They

agreed, finally, that whichever died first should, with God's permission, appear to the other, announcing which of the two was right. After death, therefore, one of them visited the survivor in a dream, bringing this message: *Nec taliter, nec aliter, sed totaliter aliter*. "Not as thou didst think, nor yet as I, but different utterly." The world to come will be a world full of surprises. But this inevitable ignorance of form or detail leaves the question on our hands whether or no certain determinate beliefs about heaven may not as such be implicit in faith, and be instinctively recognised in that character when they are pointed out, say, by the preacher.

I mean, of course, the genuine utterances of the believing consciousness, not random suggestions of fancy, such as occur in bad eschatological hymns. The region is one where we speak not in science but in faith. On the other hand, just because faith is opposed to sight and yet includes knowledge, there is something real and true to be said respecting the life beyond. Gazing forward, we see more than a field of shapeless mist.

The unlikeness of heaven to earth has been insisted on so emphatically, in restraint of imagination, that it is worth while to note how religion at its deepest rather assumes a fundamental *likeness*. The preacher who speaks of the next life must speak of it in terms of its affinities in the present. He must prolong our holiest experience beyond the grave, and draw down the heavenly into the days and years we are living now. This the Fourth Gospel does habitually; it refuses to acknowledge any distinction of then and now within the one experience of "eternal life." "Life," man's highest good and God's chief boon, is no earth-born thing in the sense that we can produce

or earn it; but we still may have it on earth as a firstfruits, an instalment of the richer possession kept in store. If it is true that "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him," yet to this the apostle adds: "But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit" (1 Cor. ii. 9, 10). To the believer in Christ, the quality of the coming life is not alien or remote; he looks on to the fuller bestowment of an experience which already has attested its own content and sufficiency. Now it is from the vantage-ground of this actual experience that we ask how far that glorified form of life, called heaven, can be known. Obviously, to vindicate its likeness to spiritual life here and now is by no means to cast doubt on the truth of its unlikeness, or to miss the fact that present experience, at its loftiest, points forward to a transcendent completion. We gradually become aware of two contrasts, the perfect solution of which lies in the future: first, that between the inner riches of faith and their defective outward expression. Existence as we know it is a vehicle so unequal to the life of God as to impede its full manifestation. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." Next is the tension or distance between seed and fruit, between the creative divine origination of new life in the soul and its promised consummation. "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect." So that to the believer his experience must appear very much a living contradiction. He longs to be perfectly that which he is, to enjoy what in principle is already all his own.

Taking "heaven" as a short name for that perfect future experience of which we now have

an earnest, we begin with the position that heaven consists in the unhindered possession of God. No other starting-point is admissible; our hope is specifically religious only as it rests on Him. I am not now speaking of motive but of content, and in the content of Christian hope God is first and last. It is the lesson of all mysticism that He is precious for His own sake, that gifts are nothing save as they are enjoyed in Him. He is Himself salvation, His loving power the fount and guarantee of all blessings.

For spiritual natures, to possess God means to have fellowship with Him, and fellowship as we must think of it includes knowledge, enjoyment and assimilation. Each of these has the promise of completion. Not that we do not know God here; the substance of faith is that in Jesus we apprehend His very mind and heart. Nevertheless it is a limited apprehension; ever and again we are led to confess that He dwells in light inaccessible, that His judgments are unsearchable and His ways past finding out. Hence the prospect of knowing Him face to face, even as we are known, is something new and very great, the importance of which comes out with a sudden clearness if we try the experiment of thinking it away. "Whom having not seen ye love" is one thing; "We shall see Him as He is" is another thing, and the difference of the two is the measure of what a Christian means by heaven. The body and the world are great facts that come under the will of God and are to be received with thanksgiving, but they are far from being entirely transparent media for our relation to Him; there is an opaqueness removable only by death. Obstacles will then disappear once and for all. We shall actually see God, and seeing Him will be our life.



In this great hope, the Christian mind is aware of no distinction, as regards the object of future communion, between God and Christ. That distinction is felt to be irrelevant at this point and in this context. It is not that Christ is thought of as vanishing impersonally in the depths of Godhead. No future would have any value which did not offer a closer intimacy with Him. We are not now so near to Him as we long to be. Every conception we form of Him, on the basis of redemption as an experience, makes way with lengthening life for a conception higher and yet higher, till the conviction is forced upon us that an amazing revelation of His glory is still to come of which all we have hitherto learned exhibits only a faint trace. The future would grow dark if we became persuaded that our communion with Christ was never to outgo the limits of the present, never to be more continuous, more profound, more enthralling. But a faith like St. Paul's pierces the clouds of time and anticipates a fellowship with Christ that is not merely as good as the present, but "very far better." Christ has that to give men, through immediate communion with Himself, which it is impossible even to describe in any language we can use, but which is the necessary crown of his redeeming work. No one need suppose that ideas of this sort are only a pietistic luxury. On the contrary, we cannot dispense with them if we are to live worthily as His disciples. To remove the hope of seeing Christ beyond the grave, in an unclouded fellowship, is to cut the root of Christian life and power. We cannot imagine a point at which our sense of indebtedness to Him will terminate, or our desire to serve in payment of the obligation. Many things we shall outgrow and leave behind, but not the consciousness of owing everything to God's love

in Jesus, the historic Mediator. "Sight" in heaven, as contrasted with "faith" on earth, does not mean that no further need will exist for the attitude of trustful dependence; rather the love of God will for ever reach us through the Son, in whom divine mercy and human faith are both perfect.

Still, it must be that one day all baffling difference between Christ and the God He mediates to us will pass away. That difference is felt too often now. "Even in Christ, who is God manifest in the flesh," it has been said, "we often see the flesh and not God."<sup>1</sup> It is one of our chief troubles that the Father and the Son seem at times to be unlike, and a distracted faith projects behind the Saviour a mysterious and inscrutable realm of divine life of which Jesus is no index, and from which terrible unknown forces may break out. This fear lest God in part should not resemble Christ, lest He should be at times indifferent or hostile, is the form of unbelief that most easily besets the religious mind. And part of faith's implicit promise is that we shall yet see God and Christ as wholly one. The life and activity of Christ will be known as conveying to us all the love and life and power of the Godhead. Communion with the Father and with the Son are two aspects of one fact—we *believe* that now, and only sin can cloud our belief in it, but we shall *see* it hereafter as we do not see it now.

The knowledge of God in which such fellowship consists is also a personal enjoyment of Him. Love to God, in men made perfect, has no more to struggle with its opposite, and the heart at leisure from sin and selfishness must draw an unmingled gladness from that supreme communion.

<sup>1</sup> Dale, *Christ and the Future Life*, 23.

Not only so; but the knowledge and enjoyment of God, in a world where everything reveals Him, will refine and mould the soul in His very image. As in this life, we shall be changed by beholding; and if the receptivity of the beholders is become quite mature, both in capacity and will, then at last the glory of the divine nature will be mirrored truly in the children of the Father. To gaze on God will be assimilation. It is not a mere passive consciousness of God's presence but an active sharing in His mind and will.

One great principle has now emerged clearly. The life everlasting is a life constituted by moral selfhood in which personality lasts on and assumes its perfected form. This, as is well known, has been denied by varied forms of æsthetic mysticism. In recent years Troeltsch has resuscitated an Oriental or Neoplatonic form of theory, according to which human individuality is consummated by absorption; the soul is lost in God, a provisional and temporary fellowship of love on the other side of death being finally replaced by the dissolution of personal life, as finite spirits return to and are submerged in the infinite life of Deity. Union of wills is a mere transition point, and though it may persist for a season even beyond the grave, the last scene in the drama is the confluence of the minor human tributary with the boundless ocean. The only thing to be said of this is that it directly falsifies the Christian thought of God. His is a holy love, and in virtue of holiness it keeps the limits of moral being and will invade no man's personality, whether in this world or the next. A life which cannot diffuse its utmost riches within the forms of personal communion, and to which the vital impulses of self-maintenance and self-impartation are only impediments to be swept away, is emphatically not the life of Him whom

Jesus loved and trusted. To represent a moral order in which personal love for persons is the supreme unifying principle as being finally supplanted by an ethically disparate order where no place remains for a plurality of finite conscious centres, and still more, perhaps, to picture this closing dispensation of impersonality as following upon an indefinitely long period after death in which personality still prevails, is to confess the despair of thought. Anti-personal mysticism, so far from clarifying our ideas of the future life, renders clear thinking an impossibility. No doubt a certain sort of mind welcomes the prospect of dissolution as opening a door of escape from personal *ennui*, but to most the result will seem a moral horror. The truth is, an experience not in any way attached to a self-conscious mind is a non-ens. Similarly, the prospect of an ultimate Nirvana in which Christ and believers equally should be drowned in unconsciousness must repel both reason and faith. The whole construction is one proof more than no one can override moral realities with impunity, and that only a short step leads from the alleged superhuman to what is really sub-human and sub-ethical. Doubtless all these quasi-Buddhistic arguments might have force if there had been no such person as Jesus. In reality they count for nothing, because in Him we have known the love of God as a love that seeks not the final abrogation of personality but its preservation and enrichment.

Heaven, then, means that the spiritual communion with God in which His children here find blessedness will be carried on in a new and perfect way. This relation to God is the decisive fact. Yet although the first and deepest fact, it is not the whole fact on which the believing mind lays hold. We cannot think of God in abstraction

from the Kingdom of which He is Head, or conceive the Father apart from His children. Here is the point at which mysticism gives no satisfaction. It has always drawn a picture of a single finite consciousness in solitary communion with God. There is an excellent saying of Dr. Bigg to the effect that the formula of Stoicism was "My soul and God," whereas the Christian formula is "My soul, my brother's soul, and God." The New Testament makes no provision for unattached Christians, never, indeed, seems to contemplate their existence, its interest being wholly given to a society animated by a Spirit uniting all the members into one body; and in like manner its conception of the immortal future, always, is that of a Kingdom or community in which soul is one with soul in the overshadowing love of God. Love of God is there the controlling force; but to this, as we know even here, love of man is no hindrance, for God's own love, as it has been put, is felt as an enveloping pervasive atmosphere, from which individual loves draw meaning and power. Nearness to God is the bond of finite hearts. It does not contract my interests to be close to Him; rather I am the more capable of intensified and unselfish care for my neighbour as He unites me to Himself. Hence the believing thought of death and all that follows it will include the anticipation of a common life such that, just because each individual is now in unimaginably close communion with God, minds can enter more deeply and truly into each other than present experience admits of, or any experience possible in a finite system in which spiritual intercourse depends on the imperfect medium of words or acts. Here, our faculty of sympathetic consciousness is narrowly limited, and what we may call the machinery of love's expression fails, often, in our sorest troubles;

part of heaven's promise is the abolition, for good and all, of these defects and obstacles to mutual care.

In the light of these considerations I cannot but feel that the question, "Shall we know each other after death?" has frequently been canvassed with a timorous caution very seriously at variance with Jesus' great thought of God. We may, indeed, reject that thought; but once we have accepted it as our own, no real doubt as to the coming reunion with beloved dead friends is in keeping with the Christian gospel. When doubt is felt, it is nearly always due to the well-nigh incurable individualism that afflicts modern religion. Of this the Bible has no trace. Part of Israel's mission was to rise beyond the self-centredness of Greek ideas of immortality and to unveil the divine purpose to establish a Kingdom or communal life of the blessed, in which the individual attains the goal only through the whole of which he is a member. Similarly in the New Testament, what is held forth is the prospect of a divine society, begun on earth, and made perfect hereafter, a society composed of all saintly souls, each ministering to all the love and gifts of God. None can be blessed in isolation. Reunion with lost friends, accordingly, is not a sentimental detail in pictures traced by fancy; it is part of the hope guaranteed in Jesus. If we know the God present in Jesus, we know too, as it has been put, that "He has no private blessing for me apart from the rest of the family."<sup>1</sup> In the unseen world, as in this, each new gift unites us not only to the Father, but to all the brothers of His household.

One reason why the fact of reunion has seemed

<sup>1</sup> Forbes Robinson, *Letters*, 153.



doubtful, is that reunion itself has often been conceived under too gross and earthly forms. "When they rise from the dead they neither marry nor are given in marriage"—this word of Jesus is one that we still have need to ponder; and there will always be those probably who easily forget that family or social bonds are only emblems of higher unions yet to come. Assuming this, however, it is self-evident to the Christian that divine love cannot have purposed the ultimate suppression or extinction of that love of man to man which is the noblest outgrowth and fruit of history. If love be the flower of personal life, we can trust the Father to make it more deep and true, and to provide such new modes of existence as shall serve to manifest it more transparently. Here, the worst and the best in us often lie hid; there, the veil will be taken off, and what the unwearied grace of God has made of us will come out into the light, and find entrance into hearts we love. Not only so, but there seems no reason why we should not believe that the more perfect and spiritual aspects of earthly affection may keep in the future life that personal fragrance they have gathered in the passing years. Permanence, we may trust, will be given to whatever is in harmony with the Spirit of Jesus.

It is uplifting to dwell with imaginative reverence upon the new richness of fellowship that is in store for all who are one in God. We may be vividly conscious of kinship with all who love Christ, yet feel ourselves separated from many of them by our fault or theirs; or it may be that we realise impatiently how narrow are the confines of human love, how inexorable the laws of space and time forbidding us to win the close intimacy of the good and wise. It is much to know



that these limits and infirmities will disappear. But if we are to come to the great multitude which no man can number, the spirits of just men made perfect, and to find delight in all souls united in fellowship with God, these minds of ours must undergo some unimaginable change. They must be dilated to the measure of a universal love. A recent writer asks : " What if the bliss of heaven means an extension of consciousness in the case of individual spirits analogous to the omnipresence of Jesus ? " <sup>1</sup>

But in the field of moral life all real communion passes into service. Love to the Father proves its truth by love to His children, and love is only content when it has given as well as received. All sensuous thoughts of future bliss die in this atmosphere. Heaven has no significance for moral beings if the noblest and most unselfish earthly toil has nothing in the world to come that perpetuates its worth and its creative revelation of personality. God will have servants in His heavenly kingdom who are not lost in Him, but saved for life and action. To venture a description of our future work would, of course, be foolish, and our terms are in any case discredited by their sense-origin. All we know is that the experience within which service is done will be one enriched by the great harvests of history, and in which our task will be a perfect occasion for our powers.

Does not this mean that when men have dreamed of ideal societies and utopias, in which full and rich life should be mediated by relationship of unclouded trust and unselfish ministry, their dreams were better than they knew? Those visions of a golden age cannot, it is true, be fulfilled

<sup>1</sup> E. Bevan, in the *Constructive Quarterly* for Dec. 1913, p. 803.

on earth in the completeness of their idea, but they bear witness to an unconquerable hope. They have inspired noble hearts, in face of pessimistic counter-arguments, even if in many instances the motives to which they made appeal have been more social than religious. The Gospel comes to satisfy these longings, on their deepest side. It promises fulfilment of them all in the eternal Kingdom of God, the faultless society of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. The schisms and divided aims of earth will be transcended not by the extinction of individual desire, but by the union of all to God, in whom life and love are one. In His omnipotence we confide to create the outward conditions essential to a perfect and unending fellowship.

The blessedness of such a common life, of which God is centre, has always been pictured by Christian faith as implying the absence of pain. Characteristic words of the Bible point to the cessation of all suffering in the future Kingdom, and they sound a note which the devout heart takes up and prolongs. "The Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces"; "There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Isa. xxv. 8; Rev. xxi. 4). True, it would be prudential rather than Christian to make happiness the corner-stone of the future hope, for the anticipation of a Good Time Coming may be, and in abstraction from God is, only a piece of sentimentalism which in itself has no religious quality at all. The gifts of God are ours only as He is Himself our portion. None the less it is a false and unreal spirituality, alien both to Bible religion and to experience, which should predicate blessedness of a life wherein pain, sick-

ness, war or crime may still have place. We speak in the sense of Jesus when we represent the eternal Kingdom as the end of all tragedy and privation. His miracles, set by Him in the forefront of His mission, were the morning beams of the better day, the beginnings of God's new world, in which the purest and deepest yearnings of the soul should be answered, and all that pains or oppresses put away for ever. Their design was to relieve hardship and restore the joy of life in God. They gave promise that

“ There will at last appear  
The world, the order, which God meant should be.”

The Father, according to Jesus, is not holy love merely; He is infinite power as well; and His purpose is to bring in a lasting dispensation where a new humanity will find an environment without flaw or stain. Much certainly may be said in favour of the belief that as long as sin persists on earth even the blessed in heaven participate in Christ's sympathetic union with His struggling people, and that while “ Zion, in her agony, with Babylon must cope,” they too taste the spiritual pain entailed by such communion. Certainly we cannot think it otherwise, or ask for a calm not given to Christ Himself; for the servant is not above his Lord. But two things must be borne well in mind. First, if the element of pain, sacrificial and redeeming, touches even the life of God, who is over all blessed for ever, yet it is as somehow subordinate, merged in a deeper joy. We too have felt how it is gladness to suffer for one we love. There is a profounder life to which in certain conditions even pain can minister, although pain in itself is evil. And secondly, sin will have an end, therefore also pain, even of

this intercessory and sympathetic kind, will quite cease and pass away. The final consummation of all things must be such as to satisfy even the righteous love of God.

But the absence of hostile conditions is, for spirits made one with God, the equivalent of unending progress. Too often the life of heaven has been figured as a scene of rest so changeless as to be indistinguishable from stagnation; and against this a natural protest is now made not purely in the name of modern ideals of activity, but in behalf of ideas fundamental to Bible religion. Whatever be the inscrutable enigmas of eternity and time, it must still be held that finite personal life is wholly unintelligible apart from change, and for lives inspired by God change is growth. All that is said in the New Testament, for example, as to future reward seems to point in the direction of a state not merely admitting of progress, but requiring it. So far as we can gather, Jesus gave promise of rewards differing in the case of different individuals: thus He spoke of places in the Kingdom near to Himself which shall be given to those for whom they are prepared (Mark x. 40 ff.). St. Paul, too, declares plainly that each shall receive his own reward according to his own labour (1 Cor. iii. 8).

Hence it may help to lessen the unreality of thought on the subject of heaven if we cease to figure that higher life as oppressed, so to say, by an unvarying monotony of attainment. The thought of Jesus, that place in His Kingdom is fixed by receptivity for the divine life attained on earth, may well dissipate that error, suggesting as it does that men will there have before them the most varied tasks of acquisition. The sinlessness of all is in no way incompatible with this, for it is only our incurably negative ideal of good-

ness that leads us to conceive sinlessness as identical with perfection. In any case, we may well believe that for the sinless there will still be "new lessons to be learned, new battles to be fought, new experiences to be gained, new services to be rendered."<sup>1</sup> In a word, it will be a life of change, of progress, of movement. The continuity of this life with the next would be severed at a stroke if the fluid and dynamic conditions of earthly moral experience were on a sudden to be replaced by static and unchanging modes. So, if heaven be a moral life, the gifts of God will still be made ours by desire and appropriation. The goal we can conceive only as a fully known divine sonship, unimpeded by any least incapacity to receive or to enjoy. Life will move within the fact of perfect love answering to, and subsisting on, the blessed love of God; and in an experience so qualified, effort is one with eternal satisfaction.

In conclusion, it may not be unnecessary to repeat that the Christian Hope is part of the living substance of faith itself. True, eschatological ideas have often been put forward which have in them nothing Christian whatever, and whose origin is rather to be sought in the influence of the higher paganism. But when these things have been cleared away, and we have made up our minds what the Christian Hope is, what it does and does not contain, let us not fail to recollect that it is not less certain than anything else to which the Gospel testifies. He who looks with faith to Jesus is as sure of the life everlasting as of the forgiveness of sins.

<sup>1</sup> Adams Brown, *The Christian Hope*, 173.

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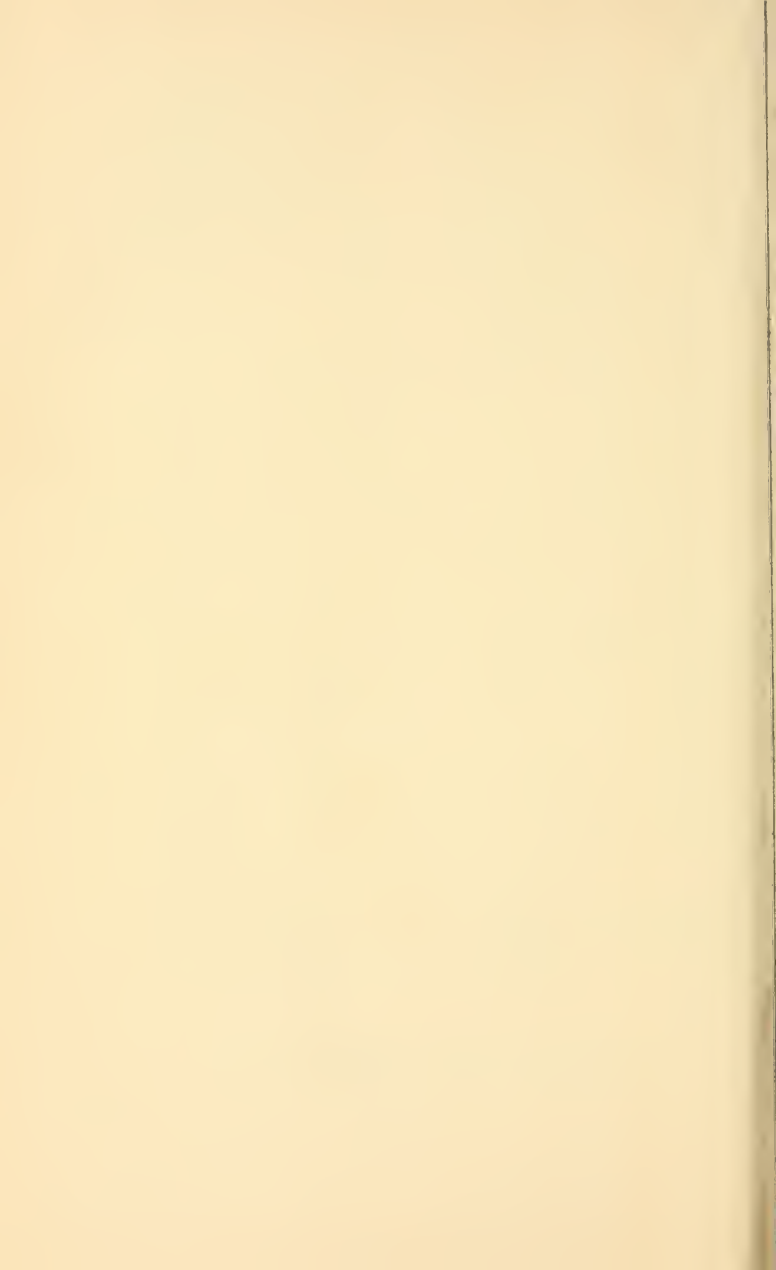
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